



A WEEKLY STORY OF THE ADVENTURES OF TWO BOYS AND A GIRL.

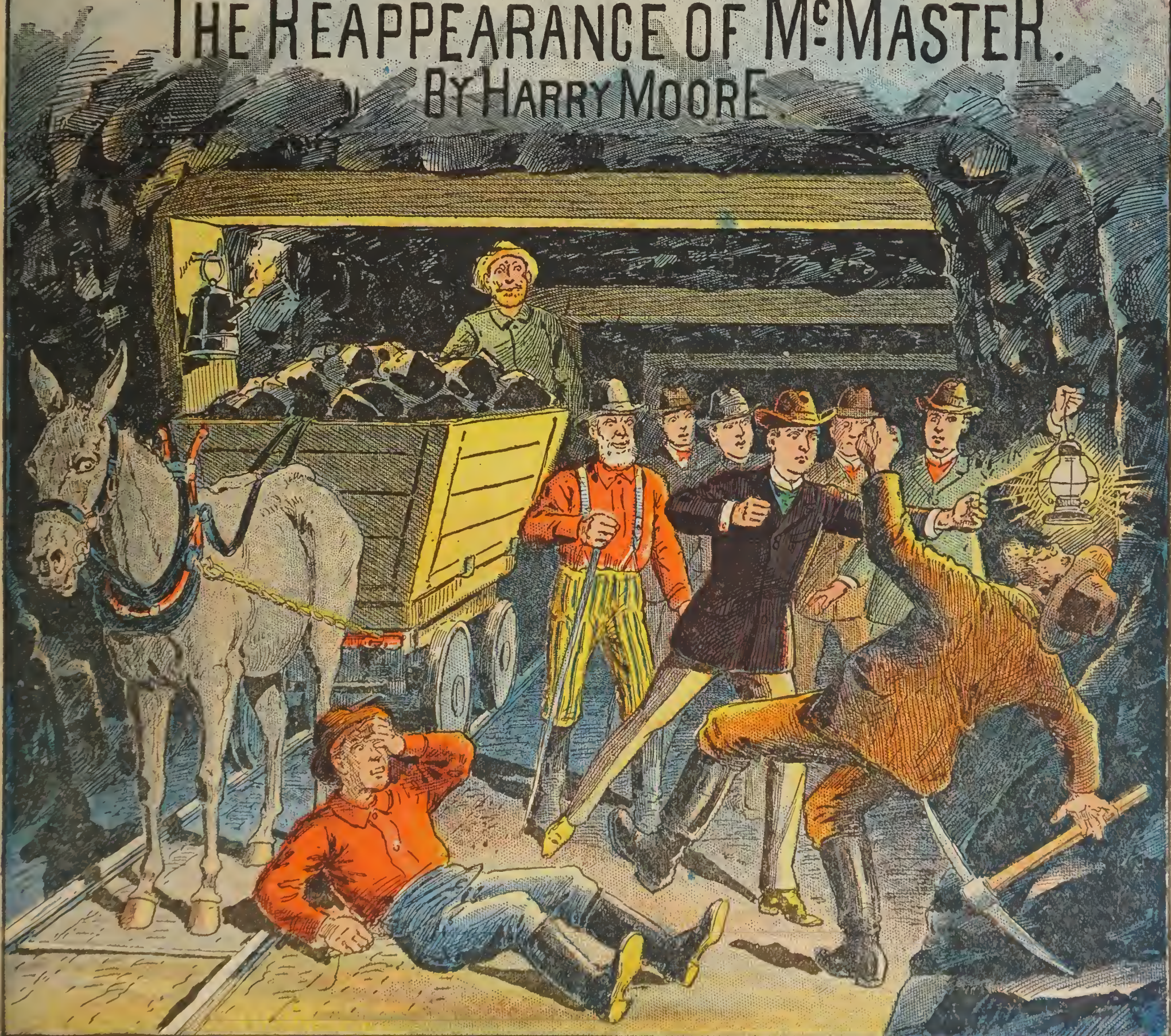
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Price 5 Cents.

THREE CHUMS' FOE; OR THE REAPPEARANCE OF McMASTER. BY HARRY MOORE



Before the fellow could gather himself together for another rush or to strike, Ben's fist shot out straight and true, and, catching the foreman squarely on the point of the jaw, knocked him down as if he had been struck by a battering-ram!

THREE CHUMS.

A Weekly Story of the Adventures of Two Boys and a Girl.

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OR,

THE REAPPEARANCE OF McMASTER.

BY HARRY MOORE.

— From —
HAROLD J. GIESE
3422 North Robey Street
Chicago, Illinois

CHAPTER I.

EN ROUTE FOR PITTSBURG.

"What beautiful scenery, Ben!"

"It is beautiful, Dorothy!"

"Oh, so beautiful! I have never seen anything to approach it. It is so—so wild-looking and impressive."

"They say such scenery as this is nothing to compare with the scenery in the Rocky Mountains, though, Dorothy," said Ben Bright.

"Well, then, I should like to see the Rocky Mountains."

"And so should I!" declared Mamie Blair. "This just suits my nature to a 'T.' I like wild, grim scenery. The wilder and more awe-inspiring the better."

"Well, the Rocky Mountain scenery will inspire you with awe, if the half that is said of it is true, girls."

"And will we see the Rocky Mountains, Ben?"

"I think so. It is my intention to take the company clear across the continent, and shall do so if our success is such as to warrant it."

"I hope it will be," remarked Lottie Small. "I have toured the East pretty thoroughly with different companies, but have never been west of the Mississippi River. I should like to see the country west of the Mississippi, once."

"I think you will get to do so, this trip," said Ben.

"I hope so."

"And so do I," said Dorothy.

"And I!" from Mamie.

"Say, I'm in on that, too!" declared Little Punn. "I've always had a hankering to go West and ride bucking bronchos and fight red, red Indians!"

"Lots of fighting you'd do, Punny!" sneered Blues Brown. "You'd be one of these 'run away, live to fight another day' sort of fellows."

"And what would you be, Brownie?"

"I'd be a great scout and Indian-killer. It'd be a cold day when I didn't kill a dozen or two of the red fiends."

"Yes, it would be a cold day!" sneered Little Punn. "It would have to be so cold that the Indians would all be frozen to death before you could be induced to go within a mile of them."

"Blues Brown a-hunting Indians went,

With gun that unto him was lent;

He saw an Indian, yelled for help,

He thought that he would lose his scalp!"

"That's the stuff, Rhymesy, old man!" cried Little Punn, delighted. "That is just the way Brownie would hunt Indians. You have him down fine."

"I don't think!" said Brown, scornfully. "Besides, if I couldn't make verses that would rhyme, I shouldn't make any at all. 'Help' and 'scalp' don't rhyme."

"Most everybody pronounces it 'skelp,' " said Rhyme.

"Perhaps they do—where you came from!" said Brown, with withering scorn. "People who know anything at all, pronounce it as it is spelled, 'scalp.' "

"Oh, since you know so much, Brownie, how do you pronounce, 'e-r-c-m-o-l-i-n-e?'" asked Little Punn.

"Let's see, what is it, anyway, Punny? Something to wear?"

"No, no! I thought you knew everything! It's a medicine."

"Oh, a medicine. Well, I should pronounce it 'cre-mo-line.' "

"Wrong!" cried Little Punn, joyously. "The doctors pronounce it harmless!"

"Oh-h-h!" and several of the boys groaned and pretended to faint, while Blues Brown glared at the little fellow fiercely.

"You think you're smart, don't you!" Brown cried.

"Yep!" cheerfully. "Too smart for you, all right, all right!"

Ben Bright and the girls laughed.

"That little fellow is as good as a circus!" said Mamie. "He is a full of fun as a monkey."

"Don't they ever get angry at each other?" asked Dorothy in a low tone.

"No, indeed!" laughed Ben. "They are always going for each other in that fashion. Sometimes you would think they were going to fight, but it is all put on, and they really think the world of each other, and would fight for each other at the drop of the hat."

"Well, that is nice," said Dorothy.

"It is that! I don't know what I should do if I had a crowd that did not pull together, and the members were at outs with each other. It would be very unpleasant."

"I should think it would be, but I suppose you had that in mind when you chose the members of the company."

"Yes, I should not have taken any one as a member who would have been disliked by the rest, even if he were the best actor in the world, as, to make a success in this business it is just as essential that the members of the company work together, pleasantly and smoothly, as it is for the members of a football or baseball team to do so. One cranky person in a cast will often ruin a company's chances of making a success, even with a good, taking play."

"I judge you are right, Ben."

"Of course he is," said Tom True. "Ben is always right in every way and in everything—with one exception."

"What is the exception, Tom?" asked Mamie.

"He is too easy-going, and too prone to let rascals who would do anything to injure him, and who, in fact, may

have just tried to do him a serious injury, get off scot free. There are three scoundrels on this train, this minute, who ought to be in the penitentiary, and would be in a fair way to get there but for Ben's softness in this particular."

"You mean Morrison, Fitch and Oglethorpe?" asked Ben.

"Yes."

"How do you know they are on this train, Tom?"

"I saw them."

"When, and where?"

"At the station we just passed. They were in the smoker."

"Are you sure it was they, Tom?"

"Oh, yes. I know them too well to be mistaken."

Ben looked grave, while Dorothy Dare looked troubled.

"D—do you think they are—are going to Pittsburg, Ben?" she asked in a tremulous voice.

"It looks suspicious," he said. "I hope not, as in that case, it can only mean that they are going there because we are going, and if they are going because we are, it in all probability means——"

"Trouble for us, and particularly for you, Ben!" broke in Tom True.

"I fear so, Tom."

"Oh, I hope not!" breathed Dorothy. "You have been bothered so much, Ben, that I think you are entitled to a period of rest. First it was McMaster, and then Cogswell, and now it is Morrison, Fitch and Oglethorpe. I don't see how it is that one so open-hearted, generous and kind has so many enemies who try to do him severe injury."

"That is why they hate him, Dorothy," said Tom. "It is so contrary to their own natures that they hate him for it."

"I guess that must be it," the girl assented.

"I am confident it was Morrison who put those fellows up to raise a disturbance at the theatre in Syracuse," said Tom. "Well, he didn't make anything by that, as Ben squealed them with his stage-revolver with no cylinder in it. Didn't the fellows look scared though!" and Tom laughed at the remembrance.

The "Three Chums" Company was on its way to Pittsburg, Pa., to give a performance of the play "Three Chums," which had made such a great hit in Bronxton, and in Syracuse, N. Y. Ben Bright was manager, and had a splendid company, the members being in the main school-mates and chums who had been going to school at Raymond Academy before it was burned down, and they were all the best of friends, which made everything very pleasant. There were only four professionals in the company, three men, and a woman.

The train the company was on was in Central-Western

Pennsylvania, the station it had just passed being Tyrone, and they were due to reach Pittsburg at 6 p. m.

The scenery in through here was very beautiful, as Dorothy had said, and all were enjoying themselves hugely, watching from the car windows.

"By the way," said Dorothy, "does this train go through Johnstown?"

"That's the place where that terrible flood was a few years ago, isn't it?" asked Mamie.

"Yes."

Ben opened a railroad folder and glanced at the map.

"Yes," he said, presently, "we go through Johnstown. It is only about twenty miles from here."

"My! That was a terrible affair, wasn't it!" said Dorothy, with a shudder.

"Yes, indeed," assented Miss Small. "I was there just two nights before the flood came. I was with a company, and we gave a performance there. Just think what a close shave that was! If we had been billed for that town two nights later, we should have met with the fate of the rest who were swept away to death. I can hardly think of it without a shudder."

"I should think as much!" said Dorothy.

"It was indeed a narrow escape," assented Ben.

"By the way, Ben, isn't it a rather ambitious undertaking to play in as large a city as Pittsburg?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, I don't know," smiled Ben. "The people are about the same everywhere, be it in village or city. What will please the people one place will likely please those at another place. We had two as cultured and critical audiences at Bronxton and Syracuse as we will find anywhere, and we pleased them all right."

"Yes, so we did. Still, I must confess that I feel nervous."

"There is no need of feeling that way," said Ben.

"I don't think she has any cause to worry over the reception that will be accorded her!" smiled Lottie Small. "If I was as sure of pleasing the audience and getting encores as he is, I should be perfectly satisfied."

"Well, you've been educated up to that way of looking at it, Lottie," said Dorothy. "I have not, and the applause of the audience embarrasses rather than delights me."

"You'll get over it before long!" said Lottie.

"I don't know so well about that!" demurred Dorothy.

"Say, Tom, are you sure it was Morrison, Fitch and Oglethorpe that you saw?" asked Ben, after a brief silence.

Tom nodded vigorously.

"Sure of it!" he declared. "If you think I might be

mistaken, however, get out at the next station and take a look into the smoker. You'll see them, all right."

"I'll take a walk forward to the smoker, and look in through the glass panel in the door," said Ben, and rising, he made his way forward, Tom accompanying him.

They passed through a couple of day coaches, and then came to the smoker. Stopping outside on the platform, Ben peered in through the glass, and soon singled out each of the three fellows in turn.

"See 'em?" asked Tom.

Ben nodded.

"Yes, they're there, all right!" he assented.

"I told you so, old man."

"I did not doubt but that you were right, Tom," Ben said; "but I wished to take a look at them for myself. They're a precious trio, Tom!"

"Well, I should say so. They'll bear watching, Ben!"

"If they go clear through to Pittsburg, we will do well to keep our eyes open, I fancy, Tom. I don't wish to get taken in again like I was in Syracuse. I might not escape next time."

"True. Well, we'll be on the lookout."

"Doesn't it seem a little queer how I manage to make enemies who are vindictive and persistent in their attempts to injure me, Tom? I have been peculiarly unfortunate in that respect."

"Yes, but you have managed so far to come out on top, so I don't think we need worry much about the matter, after all."

"I shall not worry, Tom. I shall simply wait, and if they attack me, I shall protect myself. The law allows a man to do that."

"I have known you to go a point or two beyond the legal allowance in such cases, Ben!" smiled Tom. "And I should do the same way again, if the opportunity offered, if I were you."

"Oh, I shall not stop to measure too closely."

"That is right."

Then the two youths made their way back to the coach which they had left a few minutes before and resumed their seats.

"Are they there, sure enough?" asked Dorothy, anxiously.

"Sure enough!" assented Ben. "Tom was right."

"Too bad: I was in hopes he had been mistaken."

"They're there, as large as life!" said Tom. "And they'll stay there until the train reaches Pittsburg, too, Ben! See if they don't."

"Oh, I expect nothing else, Tom. I have an idea they

will follow the 'Three Chums' Company around until they get a chance to deal me a blow of some kind."

"You may bet that is what they are going to do. You've sized the affair up about right."

At this instant there came a sudden, severe shock, as of a collision, and then a lot of short, rough jerks and bumps as if the car was on the cross-ties. And then upon the air rose the sound of shrieks and screams of pain and terror.

"It is a wreck!" cried Ben, leaping to his feet. "The cars are off the track! Come! Let us see if we cannot do something to aid the injured people!"

CHAPTER II.

A BAD WRECK.

Dorothy, Mamie and Lottie uttered screams of terror.

"Oh, save us, Ben!" Dorothy cried.

"We shall all be killed!" palpitated Mamie.

"Don't leave us in here!" from Lottie.

"We are in no further danger in this car!" cried Ben.

"See, we are nearly at a standstill. I fear some of the forward coaches have not fared so well, however, and we must go and see what we can do to aid in rescuing the injured."

"That is right!" cried Markham.

"Come on, boys!" from Tom True.

"Everybody come!" cried Spalding.

"Let us get out of the car, too, Ben," said Dorothy. "I—I am so frightened."

"Oh, very well; come along. You needn't stay in here if you do not wish to. Come, all of you!"

Ben and Tom assisted the girls out of the car and out to one side of the road, and then, telling them to stay right there, the youths rushed up the track to where two of the cars had become derailed and fallen down an embankment, and went to giving all the help they could to get the injured and dead—for several had been killed—out from under the wrecked cars and from the debris and ruins. Tom and the other male members of the company were right at Ben's heels, and, incited thereto by Ben's example, went in and worked like beavers.

Suddenly Ben uttered an exclamation, and stooping, lifted the form of a man in his arms. Then he called Tom True to his aid, and together they carried the man to one side, and laid him beside the other wounded ones.

"It's Morrison!" exclaimed Tom, in a low voice, as he got a look at the man's face. "He seems to be badly hurt."

"Oh, I'm done for!" the injured man groaned, he having

heard what Tom said. "I'm fatally injured! Oh, some water, please! I want some water!"

"Go get some water, Tom," said Ben; and then to Morrison:

"I don't think you are hurt so bad as all that."

"Yes, I am!" the injured man muttered. "I'm done for, there is not the least doubt about it!"

"I don't believe it," said Tom True to himself, who was approaching with the water and heard the words; "and if it were true, it would serve you right!"

Ben took the glass from Tom's hand and held it to Morrison's lips, and the injured man drank eagerly, and when he had had sufficient he drew a breath of relief.

"There; I feel better!" he said.

"Of course you do," Ben assented. "You are all right, and will be up and around again in a few days."

At this Morrison looked up into Ben's face, and for the first time recognized him.

"What! Is it you, Ben Bright?" he cried. "I shouldn't have thought you would have troubled yourself to aid me in any way."

"Oh, yes! Why shouldn't I?"

"Because we are not—well, the best of friends," said Morrison, hesitatingly.

"That does not cut any figure in a case of this kind," said Ben, quietly. "I'd do the same for the worst enemy I had in the world."

"Which same Morrison very nearly is!" muttered Tom True.

Morrison looked as if he hardly knew what to think.

"Well, you're a peculiar duck!" he said, presently. "There are not many people built on that plan."

"You're right about that," declared Tom True.

"By the way," said Morrison. "I wonder what has become of Fitch and Oglethorpe. They were in the car with me. I fear they were killed."

"No, they weren't," said Tom: "here they come now."

Morrison tried to sit up, but fell back. He was really worse hurt than he thought, and he groaned in agony as he dropped back.

"I'm glad they were uninjured," he said.

"I don't know whether I am glad of it or not!" thought Tom, but he said nothing.

"Ah! Here you are, Morrison!" cried Oglethorpe. "I'm awfully glad you were not killed, old man. But, you're hurt?"

"Yes, and pretty badly, too, I think."

"Come," said Ben, and he and Tom returned to where the work of rescuing people from the ruins was going on, and they plunged in and worked like Trojans.

Finally this work was finished, and every passenger had been accounted for, either as uninjured, injured or dead, and then the return of the locomotive, which had gone to Johnstown for some empty passenger coaches, was awaited with impatience by all.

"The baggage car was not smashed, was it, Ben?" asked Tom, as they walked back to where the girls were standing.

"No, it and the mail car escaped. The smoker and two of the day coaches were the ones that were overturned. Our coach simply jumped off the rails and went bumping along on the ties."

"Well, that was bad enough!" remarked Tom, with a shudder.

"True; but we were fortunate compared with some who were in the overturned coaches."

"That's a fact," assented Spalding, gravely, the other boys having come up with Ben and Tom.

"It's a bad affair," said Markham.

"I never saw anything like it!" shuddered Pinky Sweet.

"It is like a battlefield after the battle is over," remarked Hinkle.

"Oh, Ben, isn't it terrible!" cried Dorothy, her beautiful eyes filled with a look of sorrow and pity for the unfortunates lying on blankets beside the track.

"It is, Dorothy!" Ben assented.

Presently the locomotive arrived with the extra cars, and the wounded and dead were put in two coaches, one being used for each purpose, and then all the uninjured and only slightly injured got into the other coaches, and the train started onward in the direction of Johnstown, which place was reached a few minutes later. Here the two cars containing the dead and wounded were set out on the side-track, and then the train continued on its way, but was now about two hours late. Of course, this did not matter particularly to Ben Bright, as his company was not to play until the next night, anyway, and the worst it meant for them was they would be late for supper. Ben was so thankful that none of the members of the company had been injured that he was not inclined to let a little thing like two hours' delay worry him.

"You see how it is, boys?" he remarked, half seriously. "This is a warning to smokers. If you had been in the smoking-car, you would undoubtedly have been injured."

"How about those who were in the day coaches, and were hurt, just the same, Ben?" asked Little Punn, who liked to smoke cigarettes.

"Begorra, an' it wur a warnin' to thim to not on'y not smoke, but to kape as far way from dhe smoker as possible!" said Patsy Dooley.

"Oh, go on, you Irishman!" cried Little Punn, in pretended anger. "You're altogether too smart!"

"For the loike av yees!" flashed Patsy, quickly.

"That's on you, Punny!" said Blues Brown, with a grin.

"The Irish gentleman is too much for you."

"That's right, you might as well crawl in a hole, and keep out of sight!" said Rhyme.

"There is just one feature about this affair that is not so bad," remarked Tom True.

"What is that, Tom?"

"Morrison is so badly hurt that he will hardly be able to try to do Ben any harm for a spell, at least."

"And serves him right," declared Markham.

"It does that!"

"Yes, he was a scoundrel, and he is getting just what he deserved."

"But what about the other two, Fitch and Ogleshorpe?" asked Dorothy. "Will they not take it up in Morrison's place and try to do his work for him?"

"I hardly think so, Dorothy," said Tom True. "Morrison is one of those fellows who like to attend to such things in person. No, I think he will wait till he gets well, and then start on Ben's trail once more."

"Perhaps the trail will be so faint he will be unable to follow it by that time," smiled Ben.

"We got off pretty lucky, to-day, Mr. Bright, didn't you think?" said Hinkle, after a little lull in the conversation. "Not one of us was injured in any way, and the baggage car with the scenery aboard escaped the wreck. That would have been a big loss if the scenery had been destroyed."

"So it would, Mr. Hinkle. We got off very lucky indeed."

"Yes, the scenery is practically indispensable."

"But not as indispensable as I am!" remarked Little Punn, in an "aside" that was plainly heard by all.

"Great Scott!" gasped Blues Brown. "Just listen to him, fellows! The little runt really believes the show could not continue but for him! He has more nerve than any half dozen men."

"Of course," smiled Little Punn. "It stands me in hand to have nerve. Where you have other necessary qualifications to fit you for the great battles of life, I, Little Punn, have nerve, only nerve. It is enough, however, is amply sufficient, and you needn't worry about me at all."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about you. Nobody is doing that. It would be a great waste of time. Still, one cannot help taking occasional note of your nerve."

"Take note of it all you want to," grinned Little Punn.

"I shall not try to keep you from it."

"Thanks!"

"Oh, you're welcome! Say, fellows, one smoking-car has been upset into the ditch this afternoon, and as lightning seldom hits twice in the same spot, I figure it that the smoker now on will not tumble into the ditch. The deduction being obvious, I shall now retire to the smoker and try a cigaroot. Any of you fellows coming along? I'm no hog; I don't want it all to myself."

"I guess I'll go with you, Punny."

"And I!"

"Here, too!"

"You can count me in."

Then, with Little Punny in the lead, five or six of the boys made their way to the smoker to have a smoke and "jolly" one another.

"They'll make things lively in there!" smiled Ben. "There will be some tall yarns told."

"That's right," laughed Tom True. "Punny can tell more and bigger yarns than any chap that ever I saw."

"Do boys do much talking when they are together?" asked Dorothy.

"Do they?" laughed Tom True. "Well, I should say they do!"

"Then I've learned something. I thought only girls did such things. I didn't know boys talked much."

"Well, all of them do not," said Ben, gravely, "I used to know more than a hundred young people, in Syracuse, not one of whom I ever remember to have heard utter a word."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Dorothy. "They certainly were not great talkers, were they?"

"No, indeed."

"Say, Ben, that's a sort of a fish story, isn't it?" asked Tom.

"Oh, no."

"It's the truth, then?"

"Yes."

"Then the boys must have been dumb!"

"Correct!" with a laugh. "They were both deaf and dumb. The asylum was only three blocks from my home."

"Oh, you rascal!" laughed Dorothy.

"I knew there was a joke about it, somewhere," said Tom.

"By the way, Ben, which were there the more of, among those, boys or girls?"

"They were nearly all boys."

"That is what I thought the answer would be," said Mamie. "You hardly ever see a deaf and dumb girl."

"Especially dumb!" remarked Tom, so dryly that Mamie slapped the youth alongside the head.

"Oh, you're getting sarcastic!" she cried, in pretended

anger. "You're trying to insinuate that girls do all the talking!"

"Well, they are able to keep their part of a conversation from lagging as a general thing," said Tom.

"Yes, and so can most boys, too. Look at Little Punny. He can out-talk almost any girl I ever knew."

"Don't quote Punny to me," cried Tom. "I will surrender at once."

On the train rolled, making up, so far as it could, the lost time. Do as it might, however, it reached Pittsburg an hour and a half late, and it was a quarter after eight before the members of the "Three Chums" Company were quartered in the hotel.

Ben was feeling in very good spirits, that night. As he told Tom, with whom he roomed, it looked as if he was to be freed from all danger of trouble from Morrison, and everything else being, so far as he knew, favorable, he could see nothing but plain sailing ahead.

But was it to be that way?

Had he but known it, there was trouble brewing—worse trouble, too, than any that would have been visited upon him by Morrison and his two cronies.

Ben Bright was to soon meet with a thrilling, a startling surprise—was soon to be confronted with a greater peril than any he had ever encountered.

CHAPTER III.

SHEENEY IKE.

"Fellows, he's here!"

"Who, Ben Bright?"

"Of course! Who else?"

"Oh, I supposed you meant him. When did he get in?"

"At eight o'clock."

"Is his company with him?"

"Yes, the whole gang—Tom True, Spalding, Markham, Pinky Sweet, Little Punny, Blues Brown, that Irishman, Patsy Dooley, and even—who do you think?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. Who?"

"Guess."

"Oh, I couldn't. You'll have to tell me."

"Dan Denny!"

"What!"

"Dan Denny!"

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, but I do, though! Dan Denny is with the company!"

"Well, if that don't take the cake, I don't want a cent!"

"It surely does!"

"But what could he do, McMaster? He must be a kind of assistant property man, I suppose?"

"No, he's an actor! He plays a part!"

"No!"

"Surely not!"

"A healthy old actor he would make!"

"You must be mistaken, McMaster."

"No. Here's the programme for to-morrow night, with full cast of characters, and there's Mr. Dan Denny's name, as large as life!"

A little party of five persons were gathered in a room in one of the hotels of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The five were Frank McMaster, Bert Alford, Dick Wheeler, Sam Stamper and Rye Wilson—old acquaintances of the readers of "Three Chums."

McMaster had set fire to Raymond Academy, where all had been going to school, and had tried to get Ben Bright convicted of the crime, but had failed, and had been found out himself and forced to flee to escape the penitentiary. His four chums, Alford, Wheeler, Stamper and Wilson, had received word from McMaster a few days later, and had joined him, the five making their way finally to Pittsburg, where they had been for two or three weeks, putting in their time gambling with the miners, whom they robbed by means of marked cards and all the tricks known to the gambling fraternity, the youths having long been poker players and adepts in the "art."

A couple of weeks before, Ben Bright's advance agent, Felix Fern, had billed Pittsburg for Ben's show, "Three Chums," and McMaster and his cronies had seen the bills, and congratulated one another, McMaster especially being extremely joyful, for, all his attempts to injure Ben having flashed in the pan, so to speak, so far, he was glad of another opportunity to try to get revenge on Ben Bright.

McMaster's cronies were greatly astonished when told that Dan Denny was a member of the company, but as Alford said, "it was just like Ben Bright."

"That is a fact," assented Wheeler. "See how he picked up Markham, after they had been enemies, too, and had had a terrible fight. Markham is with him, too, and I suppose that they are fast friends."

"Oh, he'll take up any one who will toady to him!" sneered McMaster. "That is all he requires. No matter how bitter an enemy you may have been to him, if you will turn around and look up to him as if he were the only one, he will take you right up and make a lot of you. But his friendship will last only so long as you keep this up."

"I guess you're right about that, McMaster."

"I know I am."

"Let's see," said Wheeler; "the show is to-morrow night, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And then I suppose the company will leave at once for the next stand."

"Of course."

"Well, then, you will have to work swiftly, McMaster, if you want to get in your work on Ben Bright while he is here."

McMaster laughed shortly.

"Trust me for that!" he said, in a boasting way. "I haven't been idle these past two weeks. I knew Ben Bright would be here, and I have been making arrangements to receive him properly. The arrangements are all practically completed."

"Oh, that's it!"

"Good for you, McMaster!"

"You're the boy!"

"That's what he is!"

A month's sojourn in the coal-mining district of Pennsylvania among the rough, hard-drinking foreigners who worked in the mines had not improved the morals of these youths. They all drank, even before coming here, but now they were drinking a great deal more than was good for them.

McMaster was pleased to hear the praise from the lips of his cronies. He was a fellow who craved this, and it was the loss of this kind of tribute, caused by the disaffection of the majority of his erstwhile cronies and toadies after Ben Bright had given him a good thrashing on his first arrival at Raymond Academy, that had caused him to hate Ben so bitterly. Of all who had prior to this toadied to him and praised him, only the four, Alford, Wheeler, Stamper and Wilson, had remained true, and now McMaster was glad to hear them praise him.

"I think I shall prove to be enough for Ben Bright in the wind-up!" McMaster said. "I think that I shall be able to fix it with him, this time, so that he won't go starring around over the country with a company any more—for awhile at least!"

"What are you going to do, McMaster?"

"Yes, tell us, old man?"

"We're in on it, aren't we?"

"You mustn't leave us out!"

"You needn't be afraid of that," said McMaster. "I shall need your help."

"All right, then!"

"You can count on us!"

"Sure thing!"

"You bet!"

"Glad to hear it, boys!" said McMaster, with considerable satisfaction. "I'm glad to know that I have a few friends left. Ben Bright took nearly all of them away from me after he came to Raymond Academy."

"They weren't really your friends or they wouldn't have deserted you, Frank," said Wheeler.

"No, they were merely toadies, who were afraid of you."

"That's right, McMaster."

"Well, you fellows stayed by me, and I appreciate it," said McMaster. "You four fellows did not happen to be built like the rest of them, to desert a fellow as soon as a new man appeared."

"Oh, we stuck to you then, and we'll stick to you now," said Stamper. "Just tell us what you are going to do, Frank."

"It would be loss of time to sit here and tell you, boys. I have one more job to do in connection with my scheme of revenge, and you might as well go along with me. By the time we get back you will have a fair idea of what I am going to do."

"All right!"

"Go ahead, Frank."

"Yes, we'll go with you."

"That's right. I'm tired of staying in here, anyway."

"Come on, then," said McMaster, and he led the way from the room, followed by the four.

McMaster led the way along the street, going first one way and then another, and gradually working down into the tough quarter of the city. Evidently he had been here before, as he did not hesitate, but kept going without having to look at street signs, and after a walk of half an hour he paused in front of a saloon, and glancing up at the sign above the door, entered, followed by his four cronies.

Approaching the bar, McMaster ordered five whiskies, and he and his companions drank the stuff down with seeming relish.

Then McMaster leaned across the bar, and said something to the barkeeper in a low tone, and the fellow, after a quick glance at the youth, jerked his thumb toward a door at the rear.

"In there," he said, and then without another glance at McMaster, went on serving his customers.

"Come on, fellows," said Frank, and then he led the way to the door, and opening it, passed through, the others following.

They found themselves in a small vestibule, and in front was a door with a panel of frosted glass at the top, upon which was painted the word "Private."

McMaster knocked upon this door.

"Come in," called a voice, and McMaster turned the knob, and opened the door. Then he stepped through the doorway into the room beyond, followed by his four cronies.

"Vill te shentlemens blease close te door?" the inmate of the room asked, and Wheeler did as asked.

"Haf seats, shentlemens," the man said, and the youths sat down, and looked at the man with interest.

The man was a Jew, that was evident, he having all the characteristics of the race in the way of features and expression, and his language, too, proclaimed him an Israelite. This Jew was a man notorious in certain circles, and there was much in his face to indicate that "Sheeney Ike," as he was called, was a man who would not hesitate to make money in almost any manner.

He gazed first at one, then another of the youths, and finally settled his gaze upon McMaster.

"Vell," he said, rubbing his hands, "vat vill te shentlemens haf mit me?"

"I'll take whiskey!" said Wheeler, promptly, who thought the man was inviting them to drink with him.

"Oh, I ton't mean dot," Sheeney Ike said, showing his teeth in what was intended for a smile; "I mean vat do te shentlemens vant mit me?"

"Oh, I thought you were going to stand treat."

"Oh, no," with another counterfeit of a smile, "if te shentleman is t'isty te bar is shust outside."

"I know it, we just patronized it," said Wheeler. "But I can wait. Go ahead, McMaster."

"I wished to see you, Mr. Isaacs," began McMaster.

"'Sheeney Ike,' if you blease, mine frent," the Jew interrupted.

"Oh, all right. I wished to see you, Sheeney Ike, to see if I could not strike up a little bargain with you."

"If you haf te monish, ve can te pargain strike, mine young frent. Tere is no doubt apout it."

"All right. Glad to hear it. I was recommended to you as being a man who would be able and willing to help a fellow out in almost any undertaking. Is that right?"

The old Jew smiled in a foxy manner.

"Vell, I haf helped bcople ven tay could nod git hellup anyvere else. I t'ink I may pe able to hellup you, mine frent, but id vill maype cost you some monies."

"That part of it is all right," said McMaster. "If I can get the work done, I shall be willing to pay for it."

"Ten ve can do pizness togedder. Vat is it you vant?"

"I'll tell you. I am desirous of taking a friend out riding in a closed carriage to-morrow evening, and I want you to furnish the rig."

"Oh, dot ish it."

"It is."

Sheeney Ike looked at McMaster and slowly closed one eye.

"Vy don't you go py te lifery stable unt git dot rik?" he asked.

"For the reason that livery stable people are often too inquisitive, and will give information in case inquiries are made afterward, while you, I have been informed, make it a rule to not give your patrons away."

The old Jew winked.

"Dot ish right!" he cried. "You haf been gorrectly informed, mine frent. Unt, since you vas gone py me I tink I shall haf to aggommodate you. Ven vill you vant te rik?"

"To-morrow evening."

"At vat dime, mine frent?"

"At half-past ten."

"Vere vill you vant it to pe, mine young frent?"

"At the entrance to the Orpheum theatre."

"Oh, at te entrance to te Orpheum t'eatre, eh?"

"Yes."

"All ridght. I vill haf him tere for you."

"Good! What will be your charges?"

"Dwenty dollars, mine young frent."

"That's pretty steep, isn't it?"

"Yah, it is pretty steep, but I must haf somedings for saying nodding, see?"

"I see. That includes the service of a driver, I suppose?"

"Oh, nein! Dot vill pe fife tollars exdra, mine young frent."

"Say, that is awfully steep, don't you know!" protested McMaster.

"Yah! Put you see, mine frent, you would radther pay it as go to te brison pecause some lifery sdable man vos dalk too much after you vos ged a rik of him."

"That is a fact. Well, here is your money. Count it, and see if it is the correct amount."

McMaster handed the old Jew some bills, and he counted them eagerly, his beady eyes sparkling with avaricious delight the while.

The youths watched him with interest, and when he had finished counting the money, McMaster said:

"That is the right sum?"

"Yesh, yesh! Tis is te ridght sum, mine frent! Id is all ridght, and te rik vill pe at te t'eatre at half-past den."

"Good! And instruct the driver that he is to go wherever I tell him, do as I tell him, and ask no questions, nor answer any after the affair is over."

The old Jew nodded his head, and smiled in his own peculiar fashion.

"Trusht Sheeney Ike for tat!" he said. "He vill say not vun vord to you to-morrow nidght, nor to anyvun afterward."

"Good enough. And you'll send a closed carriage?"

"I vill send a closed carriage."

"All right. Then my business here is ended. We will be going. Come, fellows," and McMaster rose and passed out of the room, the Jew holding the door open until all five of the youths had gone through the doorway.

"Now you can ged you vun drink," Sheeney Ike said to Wheeler, with one of his smiles, "te par is shust outside."

CHAPTER IV.

ATTACKED BY FOOTPADS.

"They say it is a wonderful sight to go down in the mines and watch them dig coal, Ben."

"I judge it would be, Tom."

"Some of the mines here are a thousand feet deep."

"Quite likely."

"Yes, and hundreds of men are at work in them all the time."

"Yes, night as well as day, I suppose."

"Certainly. You see, there is no day down there. It is night all the time."

"Of course."

Ben Bright and Tom True were in their room in the hotel. They had had supper, and were feeling better. After a few moments' silence, Tom went on:

"I would like to see them at work in a mine, wouldn't you, Ben?"

"Yes, it would certainly be interesting, Tom."

"It would that! The hotel clerk says the superintendent of the mines sometimes lets visitors go down into the mines."

Ben smiled.

"So you've been inquiring regarding this matter, eh, Tom?" he asked.

"Yes, I've always had a desire to go down in a mine, and as soon as I found we were coming to Pittsburg, I made up my mind that, if it was possible, I would go down in one of the big coal mines here and see what there was to be seen."

"That was a good idea, Tom. It never does any one any harm to see and learn as much as possible as he goes along. One never knows too much."

"The only persons who know too much are the ones who know nothing, Ben."

"That is a fact."

Tom was silent for a few moments, and then, looking up at Ben, he said:

"Well, what do you say to visiting one of the mines?"

"I am willing, Tom. Supposing all of us go?"

"I'm agreeable, but I hardly think the girls would be willing. They are usually very scary about such things."

"We can try them, at any rate," said Ben. "Come up to the parlor. Most of the boys are there, too."

"Yes, I heard them singing and talking as I came up a few minutes ago."

The two made their way to the parlor, and as Ben had said, most all the members of the company were there.

"Hello, Ben and Tom!" cried Little Punn. "Glad to see you! Come in, and make yourselves at home!"

"You shut up!" muttered Spalding, gripping the little fellow by the neck.

"Ouch! Oh! Ow-wow-wow!" gurgled Little Punn. "Leave go of my neck!"

"That makes him open up, instead of shut up," grinned Blues Brown. "You'll have to try some other plan, Spaldy."

"About the only sure way to make him shut up would be to wring his neck!" said Markham.

"Oh, say, I'm no chicken!" cried Little Punn.

"We know it," said Brown, cheerfully. "You're a goose."

"Listen," said Tom True; "Ben has a few words to say."

"We're listening."

"Go ahead, Ben!"

"Out with it, old man!"

"Yes, yes!" cried Dorothy. "If you have anything of interest to say, Ben, out with it!"

"Yes, indeed!" cried Mamie. "We are all curiosity."

"Tom is really the proper one to say it," said Ben, with a smile. "It is his idea."

"Out with it, Tom!"

"Yes, yes. What is it, Tom?"

"Tell us at once!"

"Don't be backward in coming forward!"

Tom flushed and looked embarrassed.

"Go on, and tell them, Ben," he said in a low tone.

"Tell us, Ben; Tom's too bashful!" laughed Mamie.

"All right; I'll do so. Tom has——"

"Silence, everybody!" cried Little Punn, leaping to his feet, and glaring around the room. "Don't you see Ben is talking?"

As a matter of fact, no one was saying a word, but that did not make any difference to Little Punn. He conceived

it his duty to say something, and he was a boy who always tried to do his duty. Before he could say more, however, Spalding seized the little chap and jerked him to a sitting position so quickly that his neck was very nearly unjointed.

"You're too talkative, Punny!" he said, threateningly. "If you don't keep still, we'll gag you."

Ben had stopped and waited till Little Punn got through, a smile on his face. Then he went on:

"Tom has suggested that we go down into one of the coal mines and see the men at work, digging. What do you think about it? All in favor of doing so, say 'Aye.'"

"Hold on," cried Little Punn. "How deep are these mines?"

"Oh, about a thousand feet, more or less."

"A thousand feet!"

There was surprise and horror commingled in Little Punn's tone.

"Yes, a thousand feet."

"Then count me out!" cried the little fellow. "I beg to be excused. No thousand feet down in the earth in mine, thank you!"

"I don't believe I care to go," said Blues Brown. "I have a slight cold, now, and I might get a worse one down in the damp mine."

"I catch cold very easily, too," said Rhyme. "I guess I won't go, Ben."

"I don't think I care to go, either," said Homer Sells.

"Nor I," declared Wilbur Wheelock.

"I believe I won't go, Ben," said Pinky Sweet. "I should be frightened to death."

"Thank Heavens!" murmured Little Punn; "there is one honest one among us! The rest all have bad colds, or fear they will have, and all that sort of thing, but here," and he slapped Pinky Sweet on the shoulder, "we have one who is honest enough to acknowledge that he is afraid. Pinky, old man, I bow to you!" and Little Punn bowed till his head nearly touched the floor.

The crowd laughed, and Ben turned to the girls.

"We haven't heard from the ladies," he said. "What do you say?"

"I do not wish to go, Ben," Dorothy replied. "I should be frightened so bad that it would take away all the pleasure."

"And you, Mamie?"

"I won't go without Dorothy."

"How about you, Miss Small?"

"I should never expect to see the light of day again, if I were to go down in one of those mines. Mr. Bright," she said. "I prefer to remain and keep the girls company."

"Very well," said Ben. "I will not insist. Besides, we

don't know for certain that we can get permission to enter the mine."

"The clerk of this hotel said he thought we could," volunteered Tom.

"We can at least try," said Ben; "and now, let's see who is to go. All who intend to be of the party hold up their hands."

"Four, and myself makes five," said Ben. "Well, as it is getting late, we had better hurry, or we will be too sleepy to play our parts to-morrow night. Come," and bidding the rest of the members of the company good-night, Ben withdrew, the other four doing likewise.

The little party made its way down to the office, and Ben approached the clerk and asked to be directed how to go in order to reach the nearest working coal mine.

The clerk gave the information, and then the youths left the hotel and made their way to the street mentioned by the hotel-clerk. There was a street-car line running up this street, and the little party boarded the first car that came along, going toward the outskirts of the city. It was an uphill pull nearly all the way out, and as the clerk had said, the car took them away up into the hills, and within a quarter of a mile of one of the leading mines.

The youths got off the car and made their way in the direction of the mine. The way led through the timber, but the road was well enough defined so that they could find their way, and they were walking along, talking and laughing and suspecting no evil, when suddenly out from the darkness of the trees at the side of the road rushed a half-dozen men, who leaped upon the youths with the fury of demons.

CHAPTER V.

A LIVELY COMBAT.

The attack was entirely unexpected, and the boys were hurled to the ground almost before they knew what had happened.

They were young, strong and plucky fellows, however, and did not propose to be knocked out so easily.

Ben Bright had caught sight of the fellow who had chosen him as a victim just in time, however, and he dodged, escaping the blow that had been aimed at his head, and sticking out his foot, tripped the scoundrel, causing him to fall to the ground with a crash.

Then Ben leaped to the assistance of his companions.

"Up and at them!" he cried. "Go for them, boys! Give it to the scoundrels!"

He punctuated his remarks with blows delivered straight from the shoulder, and soon his four companions were on their feet and fighting like fiends.

The men who attacked them were big, strong fellows, however, and not to be easily whipped or driven off. They fought fiercely, and it was a pretty even battle for five minutes or so, first one side having the advantage and then the other.

The youths were the quicker in their movements, however, and were much more clever with their fists, and while they got a number of severe blows, they managed to keep their faces from being bruised, taking the blows on their arms and body.

Their assailants received a great many blows on the face, however, and were knocked down much more often than the boys were.

Curses escaped the fellows as they received clips alongside the jaw or in the face that made their teeth rattle, and they were an angry crowd.

"Go for them, boys!" Ben kept crying. "Knock them out! Keep it up! We've got them whipped!"

"Yes ye hev—nit!" growled one, a great, big fellow, who had given more trouble than any two of his companions. "Ye hain't got us licked yit, by a blamed sight! Take thet!" and he aimed a blow at Ben, which, had it taken effect, would have floored him.

Ben dodged the blow, however, and countered on the fellow's jaw to such effect that the man went down with a crash. Then Ben leaped to his friends' aid, and distributed blows rapidly and impartially, knocking three fellows down in almost as few seconds. By this time the big fellow was just struggling to his feet, and Ben gave him another blow that put him down, dazed for the time being.

"Buck's knocked out!" one cried. "Let's git outer dis! Dese cusses is too hot!"

"All right," mumbled another, scrambling to his feet.

"We must take Buck," another said. "Et won't do ter let him stay heer."

"Not on yer life!" from another, and suddenly stopping hostilities, the men seized the one called "Buck," whom Ben had knocked out, and carrying him in their midst, hastened away through the timber, disappearing quickly in the darkness.

Markham and Tom True wanted to follow the scoundrels, but Ben overruled them.

"No, no; let's let them go," he said. "We have the best of it now, but if we followed and renewed the fight, we might get the worst of it next time. There is an old saying

about, 'building a bridge of gold for a flying enemy.' We've got them flying, and I for one am not anxious for a renewal of the combat."

"One of the scoundrels hit me a terrible old jolt on the jaw," said Markham, "and I would like to get square with him for that."

"Oh, I have no doubt that you hit him several as severe clips as the one he gave you, Markham. I'll warrant that you are even with him."

"I hope so."

"Say, Ben, what do you suppose they attacked us for?" asked Spalding.

"Robbery," Ben replied. "The fellows were evidently footpads."

"They are certainly paddling away on their feet right now!" said Tom True.

"Yes, and at a lively rate, too."

"They were bad on the fight, weren't they!" remarked Black.

"They were that! They put up a great fight, and for a little while I thought they were going to be too much for us," said Ben.

"Well, I thought so, too," assented Tom True. "They were big fellows, and strong. We would never have licked them if you hadn't knocked that one they called 'Buck' out, Ben. He was the leader, and the worst fighter of the lot."

"He was something of a slugger," agreed Ben. "That's the reason I hit him so hard."

The boys brushed their clothes with their hands as best they could, and then set out along the road in the direction they had been going when attacked. They kept a sharp lookout, now, as they did not know but the fellows might circle around and attack them again.

Nothing of the kind occurred, however, and presently they reached the mine.

They found the superintendent of the mine seated in his office in a building near the mouth of the mine, and when the boys entered he looked up at them, and said, curtly:

"Well, what do you want?"

"If you please, sir," said Ben, politely, "if it is not against the rules, and you will be so kind, we should like, very much, to take a look through the mine, to see how the work is done, and learn what we can regarding mines and mining."

The superintendent looked the youths over carefully.

"Why do you wish to do this?" he asked.

"For the reason that I have just stated, sir. We have never been in a mine, and have a curiosity to enter one."

"What is your business?"

"We are actors," replied Ben.

"Actors, eh?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been in Pittsburg?"

"Since this evening."

"In a little bit of a hurry to see the inside of a mine, are you not, to come off up here, to-night, when you only got in this evening?"

Ben's face flushed slightly. He did not exactly like the man's tone, and could not think why he should ask so many questions. He answered pleasantly and quietly, however:

"We had to be, sir. We could not come to-morrow, as we will be busy rehearsing, and at night we give our performance. Next day we leave the city, so if we didn't get to see it to-night, we would not get to see it at all."

The superintendent nodded.

"Ah, I see," he said. "What is the name of the company you are with?"

"The 'Three Chums' Company."

The superintendent started.

"Your play is called 'Three Chums?' " he asked, with interest.

Ben nodded.

"It is," he assented.

The superintendent reached in his pocket and drew forth several tickets.

"I have tickets for that show," he said. "The papers spoke well of it, and I thought I would take it in."

"I hope you will be pleased with our performance, sir," said Ben.

"Oh, I guess I will be," and then the superintendent rose and saying, "Come with me," led the way out of the office and to the shaft-house.

He said something to the engineer, and then got into the "cage," as the elevator is called, and told the boys to follow, which they did.

"I will go down with you," he said; "but I cannot stay. I will turn you over to the foreman, and he can show you around."

"Oh, we will manage it, all right," said Ben. "We will be able to see most everything there is to see, I judge."

"Yes, all you will have to do will be to walk around and keep your eyes open."

The cage started just then, and slowly and steadily it descended, being lowered by the engineer. It was a long ride to the bottom, and the youths began to think they would never reach it.

"Great Scott!" said Tom True, presently; "we must be half through the earth!"

The superintendent smiled.

"We are now down about seven hundred feet," he said.

"Phew! That is a good ways down, isn't it!" said Black.

"Yes, but it seems farther than it really is on account of the fact that we are going downward very slowly."

The cage was descending very slowly indeed, but suddenly, when they were still a hundred feet from the bottom of shaft, there was a snapping noise, and the cage shot downward with the speed of thought!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MINE.

Cries of terror involuntarily escaped the youths, and they sank to the bottom of the cage.

They instinctively knew what had happened. The cable had parted, and they were dropping through space down the shaft, toward the bottom—and death!—with the speed of thought.

Suddenly there was a peculiar, tearing noise, however, and the cage began to jerk and jar in a severe manner, and almost before the boys could realize it, the cage had come to a stop.

"Thank God!" Ben exclaimed, fervently. "We are saved!" Then to the superintendent:

"What stopped it?"

"The safety-hooks," was the reply. "The cage is fitted with four strong and sharp-pointed iron bars, which, as soon as the cable parts, operate automatically, and fly out, two at each side, and dig into the walls. The cage is forced to stop, then."

"I see," said Ben. "Well, that is a splendid invention."

"Indeed it is! "Prior to its invention, many a cage-load of miners had been dashed to a horrible death at the bottom of the shaft. Since then, not a single death from this cause has ensued."

"That is good. But how are we to get out of here? Are we stuck here for all night?"

"Oh, no. We shall have this thing fixed in a few minutes. Here comes the new cable now."

The light in the lantern the superintendent had brought along had not been extinguished, and, looking up, the boys saw a rope almost at their heads.

As soon as the rope was in reach, the superintendent seized it and went to work to make it fast at the point where the old one had broken, which was at the iron loop of the cage-handle.

The boys were able to render some assistance, and it did not take more than fifteen minutes to fasten the rope carefully.

Then the superintendent gave three jerks at the rope as a signal to the engineer that all was ready, and presently the great rope was drawn slowly taut. Then, slowly but surely, the cage began to move back upward, and it kept this up for a distance of perhaps twenty feet, and then stopped.

"That was necessary in order to loosen the safety-hooks," the superintendent explained. "Now we will start downward again."

It turned out as he had said, for almost instantly the cage began moving downward again, slowly and surely.

"I'll be glad when we get to the bottom!" said Arthur Black, who had been rendered extremely nervous by the accident.

"So shall I," said Spalding.

"Oh, we haven't much farther to go," the superintendent said.

"We'll soon be down, Black," said Ben; "but the worst of it will be to get back to the surface again."

"I've been thinking of that," Black said. "Do we have to go back up in this cage? Isn't there any other way of getting out?"

"There is no other way," the superintendent said. "However, you need have no fears in returning, as this is a brand new cable, and there is no danger of it parting."

"I shall be frightened nearly to death, just the same!" declared Black.

Just then the cage came to a stop. It had reached the bottom.

"Here we are," said the superintendent. "Now come with me, and I will introduce you to the foreman of the nearest shift of workmen, who will show you about in his division, and give you information regarding the various matters you will be interested in."

"I'm glad to get to the bottom!" cried Black, and he leaped out of the cage in a hurry, causing the superintendent to smile.

The superintendent led the way to where a man stood, watching the men at work, and addressed him.

"Mr. Kelly," he said; "here are some young gentlemen who wish to look around a bit. They are members of the theatrical company which shows at the Orpheum in Pittsburgh to-morrow night, and having a curiosity to see the inside of a mine, they came up here. Give them all the information in your power, Kelly."

"All right, Super," Kelly said. "I'll do the best I can by them."

"That is all that is necessary," and nodding to the youths,

the superintendent returned to the shaft and getting into the cage, was hauled back to the surface.

Kelly was very kind and accommodating, and showed the boys all through his division, after which he directed them to the next one, and gave them a lantern to carry, as there were dark galleries to be traversed.

"Ugh! This place gives me the shivers!" said Black, with a shudder. "I'm not stuck on the coal-mining business, I want you to know!"

"Oh, the fright the dropping of the elevator gave you has soured you on everything connected with the mine," smiled Ben.

"That's no lie, either!" acknowledged Black. "You can bet all you're worth that if I get out of this alive, I will never be caught within a mile of a mine again!"

"I rather like it, for a change," said Markham. "It is all so new and strange. Just like another world."

"Yes—too much like one of them!" said Black, with a grimace.

The youths made their way along, traversing the galleries, and presently came to where another shift of men were busy at work, taking out coal and throwing it into the little cars, to which were attached donkeys. Every donkey had a driver, who was as a rule of about twelve years.

The youths were standing, watching the work, when a rough-looking, burly man, a regular bully in appearance, approached them and said, gruffly:

"Wot you fellers doin' heer?"

Ben gave the fellow a quiet look, and replied, coolly:

"We are looking around a bit."

"Oh, ye air! Who let ye come down heer?"

"The superintendent."

"Oh, he did?"

"He did."

Ben did not like the air of the man, but thought he would say or do nothing to give him umbrage, as it was evident the fellow was a bully, ready to pick a quarrel, and while the youth did not fear him, he had no desire to get into a difficulty with an employee of the mine, after the superintendent had been so kind to them.

"Whar'd ye git thet lantern?" the man then asked.

"Mr. Kelly lent it to us."

"Oh, he did?"

"He did."

The man grunted.

"Humph! Kelly's very kind!" he said. "I dunno wot right he has ter be lendin' th' comp'ny's property in that fashion."

"The superintendent came down with us," explained Ben, "and instructed Mr. Kelly to show us every kindness."

"Oh, he did?"

"He did."

The fellow looked at Ben in a half-angry manner. The youth was so quiet and matter of fact that he did not know what to make of him. It was plain he would have liked to pick a fuss with Ben, but could find no valid excuse for doing so, so he said with a very bad grace:

"Well, I reckon ye kin look aroun' heer, ther same ez ye did in Kelly's division, but ye wanter keep outer the way, see?"

"Oh, yes, I see," replied Ben, coolly. "We shall endeavor to keep out of the way. If we get in the way, just tell us, however, and we will get out as quickly as possible."

"Oh, ye kin bet I'll do that!" the man asserted.

The youths made their way here and there, looking at the men at work with interest, and Ben's blood was made to fairly boil when he heard the man, who was the foreman, same as Kelly was in the other division, swear at one of the workmen for looking at the youths.

The fellow had not much more than glanced up, but the foreman was looking for an excuse to be mean, anyway, and he seized upon his opportunity with avidity.

Ben said nothing, but he turned square around and gave the foreman a look out of his quiet gray eyes that made the man quail in spite of himself.

Ben half expected to see the fellow attack him, but he did not. Doubtless he would wait for a more favorable opportunity. He would not dare attack a visitor to the mine without some good excuse. If he were to strike a visitor for merely looking at him, he would likely lose his situation.

The foreman became very alert for the least breach of the working rules, however, and cursed first one and then another of the workmen, who did not dare utter a word in reply. Doubtless past experiences had taught them the folly of remonstrance.

Ben could hardly keep from telling the fellow what he thought of him, but felt that it would be better if he did not interfere in any way. Probably the foreman would visit his anger on the men after the youths were gone, if Ben said or did anything.

"I can hardly keep my hands off that fellow!" Ben muttered in Tom True's ear. "He is the meanest, most brutal specimen of humanity I have seen in a long time."

"He's a beaut!" assented Tom. "If you were to have any trouble with him, however, wouldn't the whole gang jump us, and pound the life out of us?"

"Not by a long chalk!" said Ben. "Don't you see how downcast and bullied-looking the men are? They would be glad to see the fellow get a good licking, I am confident."

"Well, you are the chap who can give him one, Ben!" smiled Tom.

"Yes, I think I could, but I don't wish to get into any trouble with him, if I can help it. I expect we had better go on to the next shift. That will put the temptation behind me—the only safe thing to do."

"All right, I'm willing," Tom assented. "I don't like to hear him swear."

"He's doing that largely for our benefit. He wants to anger or disgust us, or both."

Then Ben started to leave that division, and go on to another, but just as he was leading the way into the gallery leading to the next division, a terrible shriek of agony, in the shrill treble of a boy's voice, came to their ears, and the youths whirled, to see the foreman beating and kicking one of the mule-boys. Why he was doing this the youths did not know, nor did Ben stop to ask, but handing the lantern to Tom True, the youth sprang forward like a tiger, crying:

"Stop that, you brute! Stop kicking that boy, or it won't be good for you!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT UNDERGROUND.

The foreman did stop, but he whirled upon Ben like a tiger.

"Wot's ther matter wid you?" he growled. "Wot bizness is et uv yourn, anyway?"

"It's my business because there is no one else around to take the boy's part," replied Ben.

"Oh, et is, is et?"

There was an extremely threatening tone to the foreman's voice.

"It is!" declared Ben.

"Well, I say et ain't! I'm boss heer, an' I hev a right ter make ther boys, an' men too, do wot I tell 'em to do!"

"That may be," said Ben, quietly, "but it doesn't give you the right to beat and kick them."

"Oh, et don't, hey?"

"It does not."

The foreman glared at Ben in a ferocious manner.

"Well," he growled, "I say et does! An' wot is more, ef I wanter beat er kick wun uv ther men er boys, I'm agoin' ter do et, bet yer boots!"

"Not while I'm around!"

Ben spoke quietly, but determinedly, and the fellow glared at the youth in open-mouthed amazement. Finally he found his voice, however, and growled out:

"Not w'ile you're aroun'! Wot in thunder'll you do? How will ye help yerself?"

"Easy enough."

The burly foreman was evidently nonplussed. He was also amused, for he gave way to hoarse laughter.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" he roared. "Thet's good, thet is! A kid like you a-sayin' I won't make my men an' boys do wot I tell 'em w'ile you're aroun'! Say, sonny, ye don't know who yer talkin' ter, do ye?"

"I don't know you by name," replied Ben, coolly; "but I recognize the species."

"Wot species?" suspiciously.

"Brute!"

Ben shot this out with considerable energy, for he was now beginning to feel very angry, and he was quite willing to bring the matter to an issue. Any man (?) who would beat and kick a boy as the foreman had been doing with the little mule-boy was badly in need of a thrashing, and Ben was willing to administer it.

Ben expected an outbreak on the part of the foreman, nor was he disappointed.

"Brute!" the fellow howled. "Do ye dar' ter call me a brute? W'y, ye blamed no-'count dood, I've a good min' ter smash yer, thet's wot I hev!"

"Is that so?" coolly.

"Yes, thet's so!"

"Well, why don't you go ahead and do it?" Ben asked. "You will find it quite a different thing from beating a helpless boy, I promise you!"

"Oh, I don't know erbout thet!" sullenly. "Yer not so very warm, I'll allow!"

"You'll find him the hottest thing you ever ran up against!" said Markham, scornfully. "That is, if you tackle him."

"Oh, if I tackle 'im, hey?"

"Yes."

"An' I s'pose ye t'ink I'm afeerd ter tackle 'im?"

"It looks that way."

"Et does, hey?"

"It does. You've been talking and blowing for half an hour, and haven't done anything, either."

"Well, I shell shore do somethin' ef this heer young buck interfere with me in enny way!" Then, turning to the mule-boy, the foreman grabbed him by the arm, and, giving him a shake, said:

"Heer, stop yer sniffin'! 'Tend ter yer bizness, now, er I'll break every bone in yer body!"

The little fellow was badly frightened, however, and, fearing he was going to receive another beating, he began

crying harder than ever, whereat the foreman became ungovernably angry, and struck the boy a severe blow on the side of the head, knocking him down.

A cry of anger escaped Ben, and, leaping forward just as the brutal foreman was drawing back his foot to kick, the youth seized him and hurled him ten feet away with such force that the man lost his balance and fell to the floor.

With a roar of rage the fellow scrambled to his feet and rushed at Ben like a mad bull! He was anything but a pleasant-looking spectacle, and it was evident that should he succeed in getting hold of the youth he would injure him severely if he could.

Ben was on his guard, however, and leaped to one side, evading the fellow's rush easily, much to the man's anger and disgust, as he very nearly fell down. He whirled and rushed at Ben again, however, breathing out threats that were enough to frighten any ordinary individual.

But Ben Bright was not an ordinary individual. Without having an iota of bluff or bravado in his make-up, he was nevertheless absolutely without fear. He had noted this fact a hundred times, and had wondered at it. It had seemed to him that he ought to experience a feeling of trepidation at least, when confronted by danger, or when it became necessary to stand up and do battle with some man half again heavier than he, but he had never yet felt that way, and he did not now. As in all the many former instances when he had fought grown men, Ben met this burly ruffian without a feeling of fear, being possessed only with a feeling of calm confidence and an additional feeling of pleasure that now he was to have an opportunity to punish a bully who had bullied and browbeaten boys and poor, hard-working men who did not dare say their souls were their own so long as they were in sight of the foreman's basilisk gaze.

These thoughts flashed through Ben's mind like a flash, and, instead of stepping to one side, this time he braced himself, and, meeting the man's rush fairly, dealt him a blow in the chest that brought him up standing, and before the fellow could gather himself together for another rush, or to strike, Ben's fist shot out straight and true, and, catching the foreman squarely on the point of the jaw, knocked him down as if he had been struck by a battering-ram.

It was a terrible blow, one delivered with all of Ben's force aided by the weight of his entire body. It was a blow such as Ben did not dare strike when fighting with a youth of his own size and weight, for fear that it might kill the object upon which it alighted, but in this instance the object was a big, burly, stout, grown man—a tough one, too, and, feel-

ing that the fellow could stand it, Ben put all his force into the blow.

The result was a wonderful demonstration of the hitting power of the youth. The foreman lay still where he had fallen, knocked senseless by the blow. He had been knocked out at one terrible stroke.

"Great Scott!" gasped Black, who had never before seen Ben at his best. "What a lick! Heavens, Ben! I wouldn't have you hit me for a thousand dollars!"

"I wouldn't hit many persons such a blow," Ben said, quietly. "I would not dare. I should be afraid of killing them. This fellow was such a tough-looking specimen, though, that I thought he would be able to stand the limit."

"He may recover, all right," said Markham, drily, "but it is evident he can't stand it any too well."

As for the workmen, they stopped work—for once, right in work hours, too—and stared at Ben Bright in wonder, and with looks of almost awe.

One old, gray-bearded miner rose to his feet and approaching the youths, stopped in front of Ben and held out his black, grimy hand, which Ben seized without hesitation.

"Thank God for that blow!" he said, brokenly. "Young, sir, that was the best thing that ever happened in this place. That scoundrel lying there is a tyrant, a monster, who bullies and strikes the men and beats and kicks the boys. This is the first time I ever knew him to meet with a reverse. He is a terrible fighter, and has half-killed a number of the men who dared to hold up for themselves. Oh, it is glorious to see the brute lying there, helpless and senseless! It is good! It is right! It is justice! What is your name, my boy?"

"Ben Bright."

"Ben Bright? Well, Ben Bright, I honor you!" Then, turning to the workmen, who had as one man stopped work, and were staring at the youth in amazement, he cried:

"Ho, men! Can ye not lift up your voices and shout for joy? Yell 'hurrah for Ben Bright,' the youth who has just knocked the tyrant senseless! All together, now, 'Hurrah for Ben Bright!'" and the old man led the shout, the others joining in with a hearty good will that was unmistakable.

Just then the fallen man stirred and sat up with a jerk, staring about him in blinking amazement, and it was pitiable to see the haste with which the poor fellows who had just been cheering Ben Bright dived back into their holes and went to picking away at the coal like madmen.

"Wot's up? Wot's happened?" the fellow asked. "D-did ther roof cave? Wot hit me, ennyway?" Then his eyes fell upon Ben, and a wild glare of understanding and anger came into them.

"Oh, I remember, now!" he cried, scrambling to his feet. "Ye hit me, ye blamed no-count dood! Ye hit me, an' ye've gotter pay fur et, too! I'm agoin' ter smash yer inter a pancake!" and he rushed at Ben like a madman.

The fellow was furious, and was flailing the air at a terrible rate, and Ben gave ground some, this time, to give the man time to wind himself, which he soon did, and then, when he had to drop his arms to let them rest, Ben went at him like a tiger and rained such a storm of blows upon him that the foreman was blinded and could do nothing to protect himself, with the result that presently he went down again with a thud, his head striking the ground with such force that it is likely the fellow saw more stars than he had ever seen at one time before.

He was not done yet, however, but roaring with anger, scrambled to his feet and rushed at Ben again. He fared no better, however, going down even quicker this time, and he was down to stay awhile, too, as Ben had caught him fairly in the throat and had put all his force in the blow.

"Say, but that fellow is something of a hog, after all, isn't he!" remarked Tom True. "He has to be knocked out twice before he is satisfied."

"Yes, and maybe three times," said Spalding. "Such brutes as he hardly know when they have got enough."

"That is right," assented Markham. "Well, Ben can keep on knocking him out until he has got enough. I guess he won't want to keep it up all night."

"I hope not," smiled Ben, "for I want to get back to the hotel and get a little sleep yet to-night."

"So do I."

"And I."

"Here, too!"

The youths stood and watched the fallen man, and presently saw him stir. Then he sat up with a jerk, as in the former instance, and he seemed to understand the situation this time, without any trouble. He said not a word, however, but scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and instead of renewing the combat, made his way in a sidling manner to where a pick was resting against the wall, and when within a few feet of the implement, he made a leap and secured it. Then with a wild cry of commingled rage and triumph he leaped toward Ben Bright!

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT RESULTED FROM THE FIGHT.

The light of murder shone in the maddened man's eyes, and there is not the least doubt but that he intended to kill the youth who had given him such a terrible thrashing.

While yet half the distance to his intended victim remained to be traversed there came an interruption:

"Hold! Stop, Snoggs, or I'll put a bullet through you!" came in a loud, ringing voice, and the man stopped as if shot at, and dropped the pick, while he gazed in the direction from which the voice came in fear and trembling.

The youths, too, looked around, to see the superintendent standing a few paces away, with a leveled revolver in his hand.

"So that is the way you treat visitors, is it, Snoggs?" the superintendent asked, scathingly. "What does it all mean? Will you please explain?"

The foreman turned pale and hung his head, for to explain and tell the truth would reflect anything but credit upon him. And he would not dare tell a lie, as here were the five youths to tell the straight of it, and he was smart enough to know that the superintendent would believe the strangers before he would believe him. Thus being in a quandary, and not knowing what to say, the foreman said nothing, but stared at the superintendent in a frightened manner.

The superintendent then turned to the youths.

"Will you please explain this matter?" he asked. "I do not understand it."

"It is very simple," Tom True said. "This man here was beating and kicking that boy yonder and Ben Bright interfered and made him quit. It made him so mad that he started in to whip Ben, and got the worst of it. Ben knocked him out twice, and then he got the pick and was going to try to murder him, I guess, judging by the way he looked as he came at Ben with the pick."

"So, that was the way of it, eh? Snoggs, what have you to say for yourself? This story is true, is it?"

The foreman hung his head and said nothing.

"Very well," said the superintendent, sternly; "silence is equivalent to assent, and as I have had a number of bad reports regarding you, I think I shall have to do something with you."

The superintendent paused and studied for a few moments, and then said:

"Snoggs, you will go at once to Division Six, Wilkins shift, and report for work. You are reduced to the workmen's rank. Go!"

Without a word, the discomfited foreman turned and, entering a passageway, disappeared from sight. Evidently he was glad to get off as easily as this. Doubtless he had expected to receive his discharge outright.

"I have had considerable trouble with that fellow," the

superintendent said. "I did not feel justified, however, in taking any action until I had full and sufficient cause. I have it now, and he will have to work for his living, instead of making it by bullying the men."

"He is certainly a bad man," said Ben, quietly; "but I am sorry to have been the means of causing trouble. I could not stand by and see him beat and kick a helpless boy, however, without interfering."

"Of course not. You did just right, and I am glad that you did interfere. But," and the superintendent paused and looked Ben's form over wonderingly, "I do not understand how it came that you were able to overcome Snoggs. He has a reputation as a slugger throughout the mining district. There are very few men who are not afraid of him."

"Is that so?" said Ben. "Then I am glad I gave him the thumping. I have no sympathy for such men."

"Nor I, but how did you do it, young man?"

Ben smiled.

"Oh, it was not so very hard to do," he said, quietly. "Usually those fellows can be easily whipped, if one knows how to go about it."

"Very few people, seemingly, know how to go about it, though," smiled the superintendent. "You must be something of a 'wonder,' young man."

"Oh, I think not," replied Ben, modestly. "I simply have a good knowledge of sparring, and am something of an athlete, that is all. I can get around quickly, and Snoggs could not, so he got the worst of it."

"And I'm very glad of it."

Then the superintendent turned and looked the men over carefully. Presently he called out:

"Marshall!"

"Yes, sir!" and the old man who had praised Ben for knocking Snoggs out, left his work and approached.

"Marshall," said the superintendent, "you will take charge of this shift as foreman in Snoggs' place."

The old man's lips quivered, and the tears nearly came to his eyes.

"Thank you, sir!" he said, brokenly. "Thank you!"

"That is all right, Marshall. You are foreman now. Don't let me hear any such reports of you as I have heard of Snoggs," this with a smile.

"I guess there is no danger, sir!" the old man said. "I am not a bully, and am too old for that kind of work."

Ben looked at his watch. It was a quarter to eleven.

"We must be going, fellows," he said. "It is getting late."

"I'm ready," said Black, with alacrity. "I've seen all I wish to!"

"I guess we've seen most everything of interest," said Tom True.

"Yes, and had a lively time, besides!" declared Markham.

"Well, if you are ready to go, I will return to the surface with you," said the superintendent.

"Good!" cried Black. "I want somebody along who knows something about the business! If we went by ourselves we would, just as likely as not, get stuck midway between the top and bottom of the shaft and stay there till we starved."

"Not so bad as that, I guess!" the superintendent said.

Just as they were turning away to start back to the entrance to the mine, the boy whom the foreman, Snoggs, had been beating when Ben interfered, ran up and, seizing Ben's hand, said:

"I wants to thank ye, sir, fur wot ye done fur me, a little while ago! I b'leeve Snoggs would a killed me ef it hedn't be'n fur you! I thank ye, sir, an' I won't never furgit wot ye done!"

"What is your name, my boy?" Ben asked.

"Jimmy Burns, sir."

"Well, Jimmie," said Ben, shaking the little fellow's hand, warmly, "you needn't say another word. You are entirely welcome to what I did, and I am only too glad that I happened to be here to help you. I guess he won't do it any more, Jimmy."

"No, thanks ter you, sir!"

"Well, good-by, Jimmie. Be a good boy," said Ben, and the little fellow said, "good-by," and returned to his post.

"So that's the boy Snoggs was beating?" remarked the superintendent.

"Yes, beating and kicking him as well!" said Tom True.

The little party, led by the superintendent, was soon back at the entrance to the mine, and all got into the cage. Then the superintendent gave the signal, and the cage began to rise slowly and steadily toward the surface.

Black sat flat on the bottom of the cage, and gritted his teeth. He was badly frightened. He acknowledged afterward that he expected, every instant, that the rope would break and they would go plunging downward again, as they had done when making the descent.

Nothing of the kind occurred, however. The top was reached in due time in safety, and all stepped out. Black breathing a great sigh of relief as they did so.

"If ever you get me down in a mine again," he said, "you will have to tie me and carry me into the cage."

"Oh, it is nothing when you get used to it," the superintendent said.

"That may be, but getting used to it is what would bother me!"

Thanking the superintendent for his kindness in letting them go down into the mine, the boys bade him good-night at the door of his office, and went back to the street-car station, where they found a car just ready to start for the city.

"This is the last car," the conductor volunteered, "and if you had missed it, you would have had to walk back to the city."

"Phew!" whistled Tom True. "Say, wouldn't that have been fun, fellows?"

"That depends on what you consider fun," smiled Spalding. "I don't think I should have enjoyed it very much."

"Nor I!"

"I never was much stuck on walking when it was possible to ride."

"I think that under the circumstances I should prefer to ride," agreed Ben.

It was half-past eleven when the youths got to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KIDNAPPING OF BEN BRIGHT.

"Well, did you get anybody to go down in the mine last night, Ben?"

The members of the "Three Chums" Company were at breakfast.

As Dorothy Dare asked this question, Ben Bright looked up and smiled.

"Ask Mr. Black," he said. "Were we down in a mine, Black?"

"Were we?" Black repeated. "Well, I guess we were! We went down into one, and as we were going down in the 'cage,' as they call it, the rope broke and dropped us down the shaft at the rate of a mile a second, more or less!"

"What!" exclaimed the girls in chorus. "And you were not killed! How did you escape?" this last from Dorothy.

"No; there were safety-hooks attached to the cage, and the worst that happened to us was to get a bad scare," explained Ben.

"Goodness!" shuddered Dorothy. "What if we girls had gone? We should have been frightened to death!"

"Well, you couldn't have been frightened worse than I was!" declared Black, frankly. "I haven't got over it yet. No more mine business for me, thank you!"

"I should think not!"

"Oh, I liked it," said Markham. "It was interesting. There was so much that was new to be seen down there."

Nothing was said about the encounter with the footpads, or Ben's fight with the foreman, Snoggs.

After breakfast was over, Ben went to see the manager of the Orpheum Theatre, and found him a very pleasant and accommodating gentleman.

Then Ben made his way to the theatre, and found Kerr, Patsy and Hinkle hard at work. He remained a couple of hours, aiding in the work, and giving suggestions with regard to one thing and another, and then returned to the hotel, where he remained until after dinner.

By half-past one all the members of the company were at the theatre, and at two o'clock sharp the rehearsal was begun. This moved off with its usual smoothness, and Hinkle expressed himself as well pleased.

"You are all right," he said, "and we are bound to give a splendid performance to-night."

"Oh, I have my part simply perfect!" said Little Punn, with an important air. "If the rest only had their parts down as fine, all would indeed be well!"

"Yes, and the audience would be made sick, if the rest of us played our parts like you!" sneered Blues Brown.

"Bah! You're jealous!" said Little Punn. "I'll leave it to any of the rest if I am not the best player in the company. Miss Dorothy, what do you think about it?"

"I think you must be," the girl replied with a smile. "You are scarcely ever earnest and sober. You seem to be playing most all the time."

"There!" said the little fellow, with dignity. "Miss Dorothy says I'm the best player, and that settles it!"

"She said you were scarcely ever sober," grinned Rhyme. "How do you like that?"

"Oh, everybody knows I don't drink! You just want to pick flaws, that's all that you fellows are good for!"

Rehearsal over, the members of the company returned to the hotel, and rested up till supper time. Then after supper they again repaired to the theatre, and began making up for the evening's performance.

Every few minutes Ben would go and take a peep from behind the curtain, and he was soon satisfied that they were going to have a big house. The seats were filling rapidly, and a great throng was pouring in constantly.

"We're going to have a bigger house than at Syracuse," said Hinkle, rubbing his hands with a satisfied air. "This theatre will seat nearly twice as many, and it is going to be filled."

"I believe you are right," assented Ben. "Well, I am glad of it."

"Yes, indeed, and so am I."

The members had all completed their make-ups by a

quarter to eight, and were waiting for the time for the curtain to go up.

The orchestra struck up an overture, and the building kept filling, until when eight o'clock came there was not a vacant seat to be seen anywhere, and a portion of the standing room was occupied.

The overture ended, the cue was given and the orchestra struck up a lively air, and the curtain glided up on the opening scene of "Three Chums!" And as it did so, a murmur of admiration was heard. Somehow, this opening scene, showing the "Three Chums," Ben, Dorothy and Tom, with Mamie additional, always made a hit. In truth, the marvelous beauty of the girls, together with their lovely costumes, was responsible for this, and then the scenery and stage setting in general was very artistic and beautiful. This magnificent opening scene led the audience to expect much of great interest to follow, nor were they to be disappointed.

The play opened up with vim, and Ben, Dorothy, Tom and Mamie all had plenty of work to do, and they did it in a manner to win frequent applause. In fact, the applause would hardly die down before it would spring up again, and the hands of the people of the audience were kept going almost constantly.

Seeing that they had the good will of the audience, the four exerted themselves to the utmost, and played as they had never played before, and when the scene ended there was great applause. And when, at the end of the first act, Dorothy came out and sang her solo, the house was in an uproar! There had been no such applause at either Bronx-ton or Syracuse, and all the members of the company had thought the applause at those places could not be outdone. But it was on this evening, but perhaps it was owing to the fact that there were nearly twice as many people present as had been present at either of the other places. That, of course, would make a great deal of difference in the volume of applause.

Be that as it may, Dorothy had to repeat the last verse of her solo, and then sing an encore song besides, and then come out and bow two different times. Even then the applause did not subside until after the curtain had gone down.

Dorothy was congratulated on all sides, but the poor girl was flushed and trembling.

"I—I wish they wouldn't do it!" she breathed. "It is so exciting. I would rather they would let me go off the stage quietly when I have finished singing."

"Believe me, there is no fun in being let go off the stage quietly," said Lottie Small. "I've tried it, and know. I prefer to be applauded."

"Oh, a little applause would be all right," assented Dorothy, "but like that!" she paused and made a gesture. "It is too much!"

The curtain now went up on the second act, and the play moved along smoothly, and in a manner very satisfying to the audience, judging by the way it kept up the applause. There was no longer any doubt of the power of "Three Chums" to please an audience.

All the members of the company did well, Little Pun, Blues Brown and Rhyme, in their comedy parts, bringing down the house.

Ben, when it came his time to sing, received almost as much applause as had Dorothy, and accepted it with becoming modesty.

The play moved steadily along, and when at last the curtain descended at the end, there was a storm of applause from the audience, proving conclusively that "Three Chums" had more than fulfilled expectations.

Just as Ben entered the dressing-room to wash off the make-up, a boy entered with a note.

"For Mr. Bright," he said.

The note simply stated that "A lady wishes to see Mr. Bright," and, looking at the boy, Ben asked:

"Where is the lady?"

"In a kerridge down in front uv de theatre," was the reply. "She said tell ye she wuz in an awful hurry, an' would not keep ye a minnet," the boy added.

"Oh, all right; I'll just run down and see what she wishes," Ben muttered, and stopping only to put on his hat, he made his way downstairs to the street, the boy accompanying him.

"Dere's de kerridge," the boy said, pointing to one standing a short distance away.

Ben made his way to the carriage indicated, and, putting his head in through the open doorway, said:

"You wished to see me, lady?"

It was dark in the interior of the carriage, and Ben, having just come out of the bright light, could not see very well, so did not see any lady when he spoke.

Nor was there a lady in the carriage, but rather, five strong, desperate youths, who seized Ben Bright, one grasping him by the throat to keep him from making an outcry, the others grasping him by the arms and clothing, and pulled him quickly into the carriage.

Then one cried, "Drive on!" and the driver whipped up his horses and drove away down the street at a rapid rate.

Ben Bright had been boldly kidnapped right in front of the theatre doors!

CHAPTER X.

BEN'S OLD ENEMY REAPPEARS.

Ben had struggled fiercely as he was being pulled into the carriage, but five pairs of hands were too many for him, and he was unable to free himself. Then, the fellow who had him by the throat squeezed so fiercely that Ben was quickly rendered almost unconscious, and was helpless.

Then a handkerchief was stuffed into Ben's mouth, and his hands were tied together behind his back. He was a prisoner, bound and gagged.

No words had been spoken, so the youth had nothing upon which to base a suspicion regarding who had done this thing. It was so dark within the carriage that he could not see, so all he could do was wait and see what happened.

Neither could Ben think why this had been done. At first he had thought of Morrison, Fitch and Oglethorpe, but Morrison was at Johnstown, dangerously injured, and Fitch and Oglethorpe were certainly there taking care of him. It could not be they; then who was it?

This was a mystery, and Ben felt that it was useless to conjecture.

Onward the carriage rattled. Evidently the driver had been instructed beforehand where to go, for no one from the inside of the carriage gave any instructions.

Onward went the carriage, at a rapid rate, for it rattled and swayed and bumped as it went over rough crossings.

This was kept up for nearly an hour, during which time not a word had been spoken in the carriage, and then the carriage slowed up, coming to a stop, finally.

"All right," came in muffled tones from up on the driver's seat. "We're here."

Then Ben felt a handkerchief being placed over his eyes, and as he could do nothing to prevent it, he made no attempt to do so.

This accomplished, the inmates of the carriage—Ben judged there must be five or six—leaped out and assisted him to the ground and then conducted him quite a distance, still maintaining absolute silence.

Then Ben felt himself lifted and carried a short distance, when he was again let down. Then presently he felt a sensation such as is experienced when one is going down in an elevator, and this was kept up for quite a while. At last the movement stopped, however, and Ben was again lifted and carried a short distance and set on his feet. Then Ben heard the scratching of a match, and the sound of a lantern being lighted, and he surmised that he was some-

where where a light was necessary, and a sudden suspicion took possession of him. He would not acknowledge it to himself, however, and awaited developments.

Next Ben was seized by either arm and led along for quite a long distance, crooking and turning in many different directions, though whether this was necessary or not Ben did not know. He suspected it was done purposely to confuse him and make him think he had gone farther than he really had.

At last a stop was made, however, and Ben was lifted and seated upon what he judged was the ground. He was soon to know, for the gag was at once taken from his mouth, and then suddenly the handkerchief was jerked away from over his eyes.

Ben glanced first, as was natural, at those who had brought him to this spot, and an exclamation of wondering amazement escaped him.

"McMaster!" he cried. "McMaster! You here?"

And McMaster, Ben's arch enemy, it was, standing before the youth with mask in his hand, his countenance looking, in the faint light of a lantern, almost demoniacal in its triumph.

"Yes, it is I, McMaster!" the youth cried, his voice vibrating with triumph. "Did you think I had given up all idea of getting revenge on you, Ben Bright? Did you flatter yourself that you were done with me for good and all when I was forced to flee from Bronxton for setting fire to the academy? If so, you were most sadly mistaken!"

"So I perceive!" said Ben, his lips curling with scorn. "You are an even worse villain than I thought!"

A curse escaped McMaster.

"You are as insolent as ever!" he cried. "Well, I can afford to let you talk as you please, for I have a revenge prepared that will repay me, fully and completely!"

"Indeed!" said Ben, coldly. And then, wishing to learn all he could regarding his position, he asked:

"Where are we?"

McMaster chuckled.

"Guess," he said.

Ben glanced about him, and said, quietly:

"I think I can do so."

"Well?" McMaster looked at Ben inquiringly.

"I should say that we are in an old, abandoned coal mine."

"Right!" assented McMaster. "Right, the first time trying!"

Ben gazed searchingly at the four figures standing near, listening in silence to the conversation, and although the four were masked, and wore long cloaks, completely enveloping their forms, Ben was sure he recognized them.

"I see Alford, Wheeler, Stamper and Wilson are still with you!" Ben remarked, quietly. "You might as well take off your masks, boys, I know you!"

A curse escaped McMaster, and was echoed from each of the four figures standing there.

"You think you are awfully smart, don't you?" McMaster cried.

"Oh, it doesn't require much smartness to figure that out," said Ben. "I knew who they were right from the moment I laid eyes on them."

The four youths jerked the masks off angrily, and stood revealed. They were indeed, as Ben had guessed, McMaster's four cronies, Alford, Wheeler, Stamper and Wilson.

"There, now things begin to look natural!" said Ben, quietly. "This reminds me of old days at Raymond Academy when you were trying to do me up, McMaster."

The five youths stared at Ben, in puzzled wonderment. How could the youth be so cool and unconcerned when threatened with a terrible danger? They could not understand it.

"Oh, perhaps you think there is nothing serious about this affair," said McMaster. "Maybe you think we are just doing this for fun, or at most, just with the idea of giving you a scare and letting you go again?"

Ben shook his head.

"No, I don't think that," he said.

"You don't?"

"I do not."

"And you are satisfied that we mean business?"

Ben nodded.

"Judging by your record since I have known you, I should say that you mean business," the youth replied.

"Yet you are as cool as a cucumber!"

Ben laughed.

"Why not be?" he asked. "What good would it do me to get excited?"

"No good," acknowledged McMaster.

"That is true. So I do not propose to do so."

"Very wise and philosophical!" sneered McMaster.

"I think so," coolly. "But what are you going to do with me, McMaster?"

McMaster laughed.

"Oh! So you are interested a bit, after all, are you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! Of course I'm interested. That is natural."

"So it is. Well, I don't mind telling you. You remember of course that I told you, after we had our trouble at school, that I would have revenge on you for what you did to me?"

"Oh, yes; I remember."

"Good!" cried the youth, his eyes gleaming, his lips parted in a wicked smile. "I'm glad you do remember! I know I do! I said I would have revenge, Ben Bright, and I will! I am going to leave you here in this old, deserted mine to starve! That will be a sweet revenge!" and McMaster laughed like a fiend.

In spite of himself Ben could not repress a shudder.

The sharp eyes of McMaster noted it, and he laughed with demoniacal glee.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "That touches you in a tender spot, doesn't it! Glad of it! I thought I could make you quiver! Just think of what is before you—starvation, slow but sure! And then there are rats! Hundreds of them, great, big, hungry, fierce fellows who will eventually pull you down and gnaw you to pieces! Think of that!" and the fellow laughed still louder.

"You demon!" said Ben, in such a fierce, scathing tone that McMaster was almost startled. "You are the most utterly conscienceless villain that ever I saw in all my life, McMaster!"

"You think so, do you?" the fellow sneered.

"I know so."

"Oh, all right. You are welcome to your opinion, since it doesn't count, anyway! Twenty-four hours from now and you won't have any opinion on any subject!"

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it."

Ben smiled.

"You have been sure of things before, McMaster, and found that you were out of your reckoning."

"Yes, but this time I have you dead to rights, Ben Bright, and you will not escape."

"Perhaps not."

"There is no 'perhaps' about it. You can't escape. There is no possible chance for you to do so. We are going to pull the cage up out when we go, and there will be no way for you to get out, even if you succeed in freeing your hands, which I am going to leave tied, as an additional guarantee that my plan of revenge will be successful."

"That is like you!" remarked Ben, contemptuously. "Hadn't you better tie my feet and gag me again? Better make sure while you are at it!"

Even McMaster's thick hide was pierced, and he flushed.

"Don't get too gay!" he threatened, "or I might take you at your word."

"Do so. Who cares?" cried Ben, who was now angry. "You are a cowardly cur, McMaster, and I am glad of the opportunity of telling you so, even though a prisoner in your hands. I should advise you to do those very things, for as sure as I escape from here and lay hands on you, it

will go hard with you! I shall show you no more consideration than if you were a worthless cur!"

"Go on!" said McMaster. "Rave, if you want to; it will do you no good."

"Well, it does me some good to tell you what I think of you," said Ben. "And if you were to take a tumble to yourself it might do you some good, too."

"Bah! Well, boys, shall we be going?" this to his cronies.

"I'm ready at any time."

"So am I."

"Here, too!"

"Ditto, me!"

"Well, we might as well go, then, for I don't see that there is anything to be gained by staying here and listening to Ben Bright's ravings. I suppose none of you wish to kiss him good-by!" with a laugh.

"I'd rather smack him in the kisser with my fist!" growled Alford.

"That would suit me, too!" from Wheeler.

"I'd like to slap him once, just for luck!" declared Stamper.

"Let's all do that!" cried Wilson. "What do you say?"

"Agreed!" cried the rest in chorus.

"I'll take the first whack at him!" said Wilson, and he approached to put his cowardly plan into effect.

But Ben Bright was watching him. He had listened to the discussion with eyes that flashed with anger, and then the peculiar glint appeared in them—the look that betokened danger.

"Of all cowardly scoundrels, they are certainly the worst!" he thought, and he made up his mind to give them a surprise. To this end, just as Wilson was drawing back to strike the bound youth, Ben, whose feet were free, gave Wilson a kick in the stomach that doubled him up like a jack-knife and landed him ten feet away on the floor of the mine, where the fellow rolled and kicked and howled with pain!

"Oh, I'm killed!" the youth cried. "I'm murdered! Kill the cuss, fellows! Jump onto him! Flatten him out!"

The four leaped forward to obey, but at this instant there came the sound of a pistol-shot in the direction of the entrance to the mine, and McMaster cried:

"Stop, fellows! There's the signal! We must be going."

Then, turning to Ben, he said:

"So long, Ben Bright! Farewell—a long farewell! I wish you a pleasant sojourn down here in the darkness, among the rats! Ta-ta!" and, seizing the lantern, which had been hanging on an outjutting crag, he moved away

rapidly, followed by his four cronies, leaving Ben Bright alone in the gloom and darkness!

CHAPTER XI.

A CLIMB FOR LIFE.

When McMaster and his four cronies had gone far enough so he could do so unobserved, Ben leaped to his feet and followed cautiously.

"I'll make them show me the way to the entrance of the mine," he said to himself. "I don't see why McMaster left my feet free. He might have known I would do this. Well, it was an oversight on his part for which I am extremely thankful."

Ben kept a hundred feet or so behind the five youths, and had no difficulty in following. His hands were tied behind his back, of course, but that did not interfere with his walking.

"The cowardly scoundrels!" Ben muttered. "Of all conscienceless villains, that McMaster is certainly the worst. But he will come to the end of his rope one of these days!"

During all the time Ben had been sitting on the ground while McMaster was talking to him he had been working at the ropes binding his arms, in an endeavor to loosen them, and he kept this up now, while following the five.

"Oh, if I could only get my arms free before they got started back up out of the mine!" muttered the youth. "I would fight the entire gang, and I feel that I should be a match for them. Right would be on my side, and right is might."

At last the five youths reached the shaft leading up out of the mine, and Ben moved up close enough to observe them closely by the light of the lantern.

McMaster placed the lantern in the cage, and then climbed in, the others following. Then the cage began to move upward, and Ben saw that it was being pulled upward by the youths themselves, they having hold of one rope, which evidently extended to the surface, over a windlass there and back down, being fastened to the cage. By pulling upon this rope they hoisted themselves out of the mine.

Ben stood and watched them as they slowly moved upward in perfect silence. It would do no good to say anything to them.

Moving forward, Ben stood nearly under the cage, and looked upward. The cage nearly filled the shaft, and Ben could see only the glimmer of light from the lantern. The thought struck him that he would be killed in case the rope

broke and the cage tumbled back down the shaft, and he had just started to step back when something fell beside him with a rustling sound, and something struck him on his left shoulder and wriggled and twisted much after the fashion of a snake.

Ben knew it was no snake, however, and instantly it flashed upon him what it was. The rope! Evidently the youths had started to pull the end of the rope into the cage, but the rope had probably fallen over the side as they pulled down, until it became so heavy, hanging below, that it pulled all the rope out of the cage. This was Ben's idea of what had happened, and it was probably the correct one.

Ben wondered if McMaster would draw the rope out when they reached the surface. Certainly he would, the youth thought. The youth would not leave even so slim a chance as this within reach of the one he hated so fiercely and was working to destroy. Unless, as in the case of not tying Ben's feet, he should do it through an oversight. He might overlook the matter, and Ben hoped he would.

And as Ben wondered and hoped, he kept working away at the ropes binding his hands. Gradually he was loosening them, and he was confident that in a little while he would be able to free his hands. He wished that he might be able to do so before McMaster reached the surface, as then he could perhaps do something to keep the youths from drawing the rope out of the mine. He might hold on to the rope, and force them to haul him to the surface, but that would, of course, be dangerous, as they would discover him while yet he was several feet below, and could, and probably would, let him drop, which would be sure death.

Slowly the minutes passed, but Ben kept working, and at last, to his great joy, he succeeded in freeing his right hand. Then to free the left was but the work of a few moments.

"Thank God!" the youth breathed. "My hands are free! Now to see if I can keep them from drawing the rope up when they reach the surface."

Ben seized hold of the rope, and holding to it as if afraid it might get away from him, he began moving about and feeling of the walls of the mine in the vicinity of the shaft.

Presently an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

"Ah! here is just the thing!" he cried. "Now I think I shall be able to keep them from pulling the rope up!"

Ben had found a projecting knob on the rough wall, and with eager hands he wrapped the rope round and round the knob, and then fastened it in such a manner that it would not become loose by being pulled upon. This done, he felt better.

"I don't know just what good the rope will be to me," Ben mused; "but it forms a sort of connecting link with

the outer world, and I don't want to let it get away from me."

Then a thought struck him.

"I do wonder if I could do it?" he muttered. "I wonder how far it is to the surface, anyway? Must be several hundred feet. I wonder if it would be possible to climb the rope, and get out in that manner."

Ben pondered for a few moments.

"It would be an extremely difficult and dangerous feat," he muttered. "I have done a great deal in the way of rope-climbing, however, in my gymnasium work, and I might be able to accomplish it. Anyway, if nothing else turns up, it will be better to make the attempt than to remain down here. Better to fall and be crushed into a shapeless mass at the foot of this shaft than to stay down here and starve to death, or be eaten by rats!" And strong-nerved as Ben was, he shuddered.

"I wonder how near the top those fellows are?" he asked himself. And then he went to the shaft and looked up, and listened. Far above him he heard the faint murmur of voices, and made up his mind that the five youths had reached the surface.

Presently he received proof that they were at the surface, for he felt the rope being pulled upward.

"They are going to try to pull the rope out," Ben thought. "Now, I wonder what they will do when they find it is fast?"

It did not take long to draw up the slack portion of the rope, and then, when it drew taut, Ben placed his hand on it to see if he could not tell something of what the movements of the youths were by the manner in which they manipulated the rope.

Ben felt several strong jerks, which were given with the idea of loosening the rope, and then the jerking stopped and the murmur of voices was heard again. Then presently the rope loosened in Ben's grasp and he heard coils of it come writhing and falling down about his head.

"Gracious! I wonder if they have cut the rope loose at the surface?" Ben muttered in dismay. And then he felt around in the dark shaft and presently a great sigh of relief escaped him. The rope was still fast at the surface. McMaster had simply dropped the slack back down that they had drawn up when they started to pull the rope out of the shaft.

"Thank God!" the youth breathed. "I still have one chance left, which is a great deal better than no chance at all, slim chance though it is!"

Ben waited and listened, and presently he could no longer hear the murmur of voices at the surface, and he

made up his mind that the youths had taken their departure.

Ben wondered if they had left the cage hanging in the shaft. If they had, and he climbed to the surface, he would be unable to get out even then.

He moved out to the middle of the space directly beneath the opening and looked up. Suddenly he started.

"No, they did not leave the cage in the opening!" he cried. "I can see stars in the sky above! If I can reach the surface, I shall be able to get out!"

But to reach it! There was the rub! Ben knew it would be a dangerous experiment, and he was loath to try it except as a last resort.

Still, he felt that it was his only chance. The manner in which he had left the theatre made it very improbable that anyone would know aught of his whereabouts. He had not said a word to any one, but when the boy brought the note, had gone right down to the carriage—and had not gone back! His friends would know this last, but would not know where he had gone or what had become of him.

No, if he escaped from this terrible danger, he would have to do it alone and unaided. At least that was his belief, and he caught hold of the rope and tested it to see if it was fastened strongly above.

Ben pulled with all his strength, but the rope did not budge. It was fastened firmly, and the youth was confident there was no danger of the rope giving way above.

The great danger was that he would be unable to climb such a distance. Of course, Ben did not know how far it was, but he felt that it must be two hundred feet at least, possibly three.

That would be a terrible climb, and the youth, whose experience in short climbs in gymnasium work gave him a knowledge of what to expect, shuddered as he thought of the terrible ordeal.

"Can I do it, I wonder?" he asked himself. "Is it possible for it to be done? Is it within the power of a human to climb a rope like that a distance of from two to three hundred feet without any artificial aid whatever?"

The youth did not know, and he could not know—until after he had made the attempt.

It was a cool night, but Ben knew the work of climbing would be warming, and as his coat would be in his way anyhow, he took it off and first taking all the articles out of the pockets that he thought he might need, laid it down on the floor of the mine.

Then with a mute prayer to Him above for strength for the great task before him, Ben seized the rope and began

he must husband his strength, he climbed very slowly and carefully, and in the easiest possible manner for himself.

Even then it was not the easiest work in the world, and the youth became impressed with the difficulties of the task he had set out to accomplish. By the time he had climbed thirty feet his hands were burning on the inside like fire, and at that rate before he was halfway to the surface the skin would be worn through, Ben was confident.

He gritted his teeth, and continued climbing, slowly and carefully, however. He literally held his life in his hands, and as he was young, strong and healthy, and saw all that was bright and beautiful in life, he had no desire to lose it, but kept at work with steady persistence, and mounted slowly but surely upward.

Up! Up! Thirty—forty—fifty feet! and then the youth, although beginning to feel tired, realized that he had as yet barely got started! He twined his legs about the rope, and hanging there fifty feet above the hard floor of the mine, rested for a brief spell. Could he accomplish the feat? he asked himself. He must do it! He would do it—or die trying! For was it not death, anyway, to remain down in the mine to starve or be gnawed by rats?

Ben started again, and worked his way upward. It was slow work—hard work, but the youth did not falter. He was working for his life.

Up! up! he climbed—sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety feet, and then the brave youth stopped and rested again. Strong athlete though he was, the boy was becoming very tired, and he felt that rest such as he was getting would not aid him materially, for his hands were what was bothering him most. They were now badly blistered, and becoming raw in places.

Ben wondered if he were halfway to the surface. He had good judgment, and doubted it.

"I am not up more than a hundred feet," he thought. "Can I make it to the top?" Then he gritted his teeth. "I must make it!" he exclaimed aloud. "I will make it, or die in the attempt!"

Then he started again, and slowly and painfully he worked his way upward. Up! up! ever upward, but it was at the cost of great physical exertion and the expenditure of considerable nerve force, for the youth's hands gave him great pain. In fact one with less powerful will would have given up, as every foot gained was at the cost of great labor and suffering.

Ben gritted his teeth, however, and kept on climbing. What would a pair of lacerated hands signify, if he could save his life?

Up! Up! One hundred feet, ten, twenty, thirty, forty! Ben made a long and desperate climb, this time, and was

almost exhausted. He guessed that he was a hundred and fifty feet from the bottom of the shaft, and he thought of what would happen if the rope was to become unfastened above, or he was to fall, and shuddered.

Then with legs twining around the rope he rested as best he could, making as little weight as possible come on his hands, which were now raw and bleeding on the inside.

But when Ben started again to climb, he found himself confronted with a difficulty which he feared would be fatal to his hopes. The pain his lacerated hands were giving him had not deterred him in the least, but now, in addition to the pain, he found that he was losing the power to clutch the rope with sufficient strength to lift his weight. The power had not entirely left him, but the youth feared it would be gone completely before he could reach the surface. Up! up! he struggled, making a last desperate effort to reach the surface, and he managed to climb fifty feet further before the strength was gone out of his fingers to such an extent that he could no longer pull his weight upward. Then the youth paused and, hanging there nearly two hundred feet above the bottom of the shaft, he looked upward in an endeavor to see how far it was to the top.

If he could have seen that it was only fifteen or twenty feet, he might have mustered up sufficient strength to reach the surface, but although he fancied he could see the top of the shaft it was so far away as to fill Ben with a feeling of despair.

"It is fifty or sixty feet away, at least," he muttered; "and I can never reach it! It is hard—hard! after coming so far!"

Ben hung there on the rope for at least a quarter of an hour, waiting for strength to return to his fingers, and then he started once more, and by the hardest kind of work he managed to climb ten or twelve feet further. Then he was forced to stop and twine his legs about the rope to keep from slipping back down.

He hung there for fifteen or twenty minutes, this time, and then made another attempt, only to be forced to stop when he had gone only five or six feet.

This was enough to cause any ordinary person to give up completely, but Ben was not yet willing to give way to complete despair.

"If I can hold out long enough, and make five or six feet at a time," he thought, "I may reach the surface after all! I will keep on trying as long as I can drag my weight up an inch!"

Then he went to work again, but only climbed a short distance, perhaps four feet. Then he was forced to stop and twine his legs about the rope to keep from sliding back down.

"This is hard, indeed!" Ben muttered. "Oh, if I can only reach the surface! How thankful I shall be, and what a triumph over McMaster! The scoundrel—coward!"

The thought of his arch enemy gave Ben renewed strength, and he climbed three or four feet further, and was forced to stop.

This time it seemed impossible for his fingers to get rest sufficient so that the youth could pull his weight up with them. They refused to grasp the rope, save with barely enough strength to, in connection with the friction of his legs twined about the rope, keep him from slipping back down. He could not utilize them to lift his weight at all!

As this realization came to the brave youth a groan escaped him.

"Am I to perish thus?" he cried, in agony. "Oh, this is terrible—horrible! To almost reach the surface—almost reach safety, and then lose my life after all!"

Then he thought of Dorothy, and of Tom, his beloved chums, and a groan of sorrow escaped him.

"Poor Dorothy! Poor Tom!" he muttered. "How they will grieve over me, and wonder what has become of me!"

Then, as a last hope, Ben made one more effort to climb higher, only to find he could not lift his body an inch.

"It is no use!" he breathed. "I am done for! My end is near, and McMaster has triumphed, after all!"

Ben groaned aloud, but not in terror; only in anguish of spirit that he must die here, alone, his whereabouts even unknown to his chums and friends. His feelings of sorrow were not for himself, but for Dorothy and Tom, who would be stricken with terrible sorrow. His part of it was not so bad as theirs. He would lose his grip on the rope, fall, and all would be over—he would know no more, sorrow no more, but they—they would live, to sorrow and to mourn.

"Dear Dorothy!" Ben breathed; "dear Tom! How I wish you might at least know my fate! But doubtless even that poor boon will be denied you!"

Then the youth felt the grasp of his fingers growing weaker, and he realized that he could not much longer even maintain his position on the rope, but would begin to slide back downward toward the dark depths of the mine! Down he would go, the further the faster, until it would be impossible to longer hold to the rope at all, which would sear his lacerated hands as if red hot, then down he would go, headlong and head over heels to a horrible death!

"I feel that I cannot hold on much longer!" the youth muttered. "Ah! my hands are slipping on the rope even now! It will soon be over! Dorothy and Tom, dear old chums, good-by!"

And then, for the first time thinking of it, Ben lifted up his voice and cried:

"Help! Help!"

Then the youth started, and a thrill went over him!

Was that an answering call he heard?

CHAPTER XII.

BEN'S ESCAPE.

The members of the "Three Chums" Company were busily engaged washing off the make-ups, and were talking and laughing at such a rate that they did not notice that Ben was missing for quite a while.

Then suddenly Tom True looked around everywhere, and exclaimed:

"Why, where is Ben?"

The others looked all around then and uttered exclamations of surprise.

"I don't remember to have seen him in here since the performance ended," said Spalding.

"Nor I," said Markham.

"I saw him come in here," said Pinky Sweet. "He came in here right away, as soon as he came off the stage. I came a few minutes afterward, but he wasn't here then."

"That is queer!" said Tom.

"Seems sort of strange," assented Spalding.

"I'll go ask Hinkle if he has seen Ben," and Tom hastened out to where the stage manager was talking to Kerr.

"Have you seen Ben, Mr. Hinkle?" asked Tom.

Hinkle whirled.

"Not since he left the stage fifteen or twenty minutes ago," was the reply. "I saw him enter the dressing-room. Isn't he there?"

"No, and no one seems to know where he is."

"I saw him go in there," said Kerr.

"So did Pinky Sweet, but he isn't there now."

"Who is it yiz are askin' afther, Misther True?" asked Patsy Dooley, appearing at this moment.

"Ben Bright."

"An' yez don't know phere he is?"

"No; do you?"

"No, Oi don't know phere he is, now, but Oi saw 'im leave dhe drissing-rhoom in a hurry, tin or fifteen minnets ago. A bhy wur afther bringin' 'im a nhote, an' he wint wid dhe bhy, so he did!"

"Ah! So that's it, is it?" exclaimed Tom. "But I wonder where he went?"

"It's mesilf kinnot till yez thot, but Oi saw 'im t'row dhe note phat he resaved frum dhe bhy on dhe floor. Oi t'ink yez wull foind it av yez wull look, sor."

"Thank you, Patsy," and Tom hastened back into the dressing-room.

Somehow a feeling that something had happened to Ben, took hold upon Tom, and he began searching on the floor for the note nervously and eagerly.

"What are you looking for, Tom?" asked Little Punn. "You don't think of finding Ben there, do you?"

"I'm looking for a note," Tom said, and then he told what Patsy had seen.

All began looking, then, and presently Pinky Sweet uttered an exclamation.

"Here you are!" he cried. "I've found it! It's badly soiled, though. See if you can read it, Tom."

Tom seized the bit of paper with avidity, and opening it out, succeeded in reading what was written thereon, though with difficulty, as the paper had been trampled and was soiled.

"'A lady wishes to see Mr. Bright,'" Tom read aloud, and then he looked around at the rest in perplexity.

"A lady! Who could it have been?" he exclaimed. "Ben has no lady acquaintances in Pittsburg, aside from the members of our company, that I know of."

"Mebbe he has some that you don't know of," grinned Little Punn.

"No," said Tom, decidedly; "Ben is not a masher. There is not a drop of 'masher' blood in him. Indeed I have heard him say that of all detestable persons, the masher is the worst."

"Well, maybe the 'lady' was a masher," suggested Rhyme.

"No, for in that case Ben would have been back here within two minutes of the time he left. He would not waste a minute's time with such a person."

"I don't think so, either," said Spalding. "Ben would have told the lady she was wasting time, and sent her on her way."

"That's right," assented Tom True, "and I'll tell you what it is, fellows, I believe that Ben has gotten into some kind of trouble. I believe there is a 'nigger in the wood-pile,' somewhere."

"In which event it becomes our duty to get said colored individual by the legs and haul him out of the aforesaid woodpile!" declared Little Punn.

"That is right," declared Tom. "But how to go about it, that is the question?"

Just then the girls appeared from their dressing-room, all rigged out in their street costumes, and Dorothy noted Ben's absence at once.

"Where is Ben?" she asked.

"That is what we should like to know," replied Tom, and then he told her about Ben's mysterious disappearance.

"He went to see a lady and hasn't got back," said Little Punn, who always had to have his say in everything.

Dorothy started, and looked at Tom, inquiringly.

"Here is a note which a boy brought him," Tom explained. "It says, simply, 'A lady wishes to see Mr. Bright,' but I am inclined to think that was merely a blind to get Ben to go down to the street."

"Let me see the note," said Dorothy, eagerly.

Tom handed it to the girl, who, after a glance at it, said:

"No woman wrote that! It is a man's handwriting!"

"That is what I think," Tom assented. "It begins to look as if Ben had again fallen a victim to some enemy. I wonder if it could be Morrison, or Fitch and Oglethorpe?"

"Such a thing is possible, though the physician at Johnstown said Morrison was very severely injured."

"So he did. Well, standing here and talking will do no good. We must do something! We must try to find out where Ben has disappeared to."

"So we must!" assented Spalding. "Well, you take the lead, Tom, and we will go with you and back you up."

"All right. Dorothy, you and Mamie will go to the hotel with Mr. Hinkle and Miss Small. We will report to you there at the earliest possible moment. It may be that nothing serious has happened to Ben."

"Oh, I hope not!" palpitated Dorothy, her face pale and drawn. "I—I don't know what I should do if—if anything should happen to Ben!" this last being spoken low for Mamie to hear.

"Oh, Ben will turn up in due time, Dorothy," assured

Mamie, in a reassuring tone. "He is amply able to take care of himself. You need not fear for his safety."

Nevertheless Dorothy did fear. She could not help it, and had she known where Ben was at that moment, hanging to a rope, climbing for his life up the shaft of the old deserted mine, she would have fainted from terror.

All made their way down to the street together, and as they stepped out upon the sidewalk a boy came running up, panting and almost exhausted.

"Air ye folks de fr'en's uv Ben Bright?" he gasped.

"Yes, yes!" cried Dorothy, springing forward before any of the rest could say a word; "what is it? Where is Ben? You have seen him? Quick! Tell us all!"

"Why, it's the little chap the foreman of the mine was beating and kicking when Ben interfered last night!" exclaimed Tom, recognizing the little fellow.

"Yes, I'm de kid," the boy assented. "He done me a good turn, las' night, an' I'm goin' ter do him wun ter-night. I kin tell ye whur he is."

"Do so, quickly!" palpitated Dorothy.

"All right. Ye see, et wuz dis way. I didn't hev ter work, ter-night, et bein' my night off, an' I t'ought I'd come an' see de play. Well, I hed jes' come out, after de show wuz over w'en I saw Ben Bright come outer dat door dere. Dere wuz a kid wid 'im, an' de kid p'inted ter a kerridge standin' right dere, an' said, 'dat's de kerridge,' an' Ben Bright went an' leaned inter de door uv de kerridge. I wuz watchin' 'im, an' I saw erbout a duzzen han's grab Ben Bright, some by de t'roat an' some by de arms an' close, an' dey jerked 'im inter de kerridge an' shut de door, an' den away went de kerridge like a house afire!"

A cry of terror, of horror, escaped Dorothy, while Tom True and the rest turned pale.

"Great Scott! Ben has been kidnapped!" Tom exclaimed. "Oh, if you could only have followed them and learned where he went!"

The boy grinned.

"I did!" he said. "I made up my min' dey wuz goin' ter play some roots on Ben Bright, an' so I jumped up behind on de kerridge, an' went erlong!"

A cry of delight escaped Dorothy.

"Oh, then, if we find out where they took him, we can save him!" she cried. "Where—where did they go, my boy?"

"Dey went up inter de hills ter an old, deserted mine," the boy replied, "an' de las' I seed uv 'em dey wuz takin' uv 'im down inter de mine! Dat's all I know, an' w'en I seen wot dey wuz doin' an' where dey wuz takin' Ben Bright I run all de way back ter tell his fr'en's!"

"God bless you, my boy!" cried Dorothy. And Tom cried, eagerly:

"Can you guide us back to that mine?"

"Kin I?" the boy cried. "I reckon I kin! I uster work in dat mine afore dey had de cave-in."

"Good!" cried Tom. "Dorothy, you and Mamie go with Mr. Hinkle and Miss Small, and the rest of us will go with this boy and rescue Ben, or know the reason why! Don't worry; we'll be at the hotel in an hour or so with Ben all safe and sound! Come, fellows," and with the boy in the lead, the party set out at a rapid walk.

"How far did you say it was?" Tom asked.

"Oh, about a mile," the boy replied. "Mebbe a little fuder. We kin soon walk et."

The boy led the way without hesitation, and by trotting a good portion of the time kept his heels from being trodden by the youths behind.

At last they left the streets and made their way up through the woods, and finally they reached the edge of a large clearing, and as they did so, they heard a voice which seemed to come from a great distance cry. "Help! Help!"

"It's Ben's voice!" cried Tom, and he uttered a shout.

"Coming!" he cried. "We'll save you!"

Then all rushed forward, the boy in front, and he led them straight to the mouth of the shaft leading down to the old mine.

"Ben! Ben! Are you there?" Tom cried, eagerly and anxiously, and then up from the darkness, but seemingly only a short distance away, came the reply:

"Yes, yes! I'm here, Tom, hanging to the rope! Quick! draw me up, if you can, for I can't hold on much longer!"

"Thank God!" Tom exclaimed. "Lay hold, boys," and half a dozen of them seized the rope and, pulling slowly and carefully, brought Ben Bright to the surface a few moments later, and gently lifted him out onto the solid ground, where the youth sank exhausted.

"Good Heavens, Ben! How came you on that rope?" cried Tom.

"I was trying to climb out of the mine, Tom," replied Ben, faintly; "but it was too long a climb for me, and I should never have been able to make it. I was almost on the point of having to let go and drop when I heard your answer to my cry."

"Trying to climb out!" murmured Spalding. "Wonderful! Boy, how deep is that mine?"

"Two hundred an' forty feet, sir."

"And he had climbed to within forty or fifty feet of the top!" exclaimed Tom True.

As soon as Ben was rested sufficiently all started on the return to the city and the hotel, and on the way Ben explained everything.

To say that the youths were astonished when they learned that McMaster and his cronies, Alford, Wheeler, Stamper and Wilson, were responsible for Ben's trouble is stating it very mildly. They, like Ben, had had no thought that these five worthies were within a thousand miles of Pittsburg, and to have them turn up in this manner was very surprising, indeed.

Hinkle and the three girls were waiting in the parlor, and when Ben appeared with the rest, a bright light of perfect happiness appeared in Dorothy's eyes.

"Oh, Ben!" she cried. "I thought something terrible had happened to you!"

"Well, something terrible did come very near happening to me," he smiled, and he held out his torn and lacerated hands. "See those! Aren't they beauts?" he said.

The girls turned pale at sight of Ben's hands, and on hearing how they got in such a condition.

"It is awful—terrible!" breathed Dorothy, giving the youth a look of sympathy—and more.

"Oh, they will be all right in a few days," laughed Ben. "Tom, come up to our room, and help me dress them, will you?"

"You bet I will, old man!" cried Tom.

THE END.

Read "THREE CHUMS' RIVALS; OR, ALMOST THE SAME PLAY," which will be the next number (12) of "Three Chums."

✧ PRAISE! ✧

Washington, D. C., Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read "Three Chums." I enjoyed them very much. The three names, Bright, Dare and True, fit exactly. No names would be more suitable for the three persons than those are. Respectfully, Miss A. L. McClellan.

Some persons are born with appropriate names, and this seems to have been the case with Ben, Tom and Dorothy. We are glad you enjoy reading about them.

Kansas City, Kan., Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—You wanted to know how we liked the "Three Chums." I have read Nos. 1 and 2, and I think they are just fine, and as for Ben, Tom and Dorothy, I think they are just "out of sight." How I wish that I knew them! I think that Ben and Dorothy will marry some day, and I think that they will go on the stage some day, but I hope they won't lose their money and be compelled to go on the stage. Long life to the "Three Chums" and Mr. Moore and Mr. Tousey. From Sadie Coleman.

If you will continue to read the adventures of the "Three Chums," you will find them more and more interesting. Mr. Moore and the publisher return the compliment.

Batavia, N. Y., Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read all of your books entitled "Three Chums," and think they are the best books I ever read. I have read many books, but I think "Three Chums" is "out of sight." Hoping they will last forever, I remain, yours truly, George Volz.

Thanks. We trust that you will continue to read "Three Chums" for a long time and like them as well as now.

Boston, Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read your new novel entitled "Three Chums." I have Nos. 1 and 2, and I think them first rate. Yours truly, Harry B. Cassidy, 38 Portland st.

We trust that you will continue to read "Three Chums," and find them just as "first rate" as now.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read the beginning of the story of the "Three Chums," and think it is all right. Ben Bright is naturally bright, and the way he defends the old gypsy woman and the way she tells his fortune, and it coming true, is simply wonderful. I thought he would be a hero at school, and also disliked McMaster from the beginning. He is a cowardly, burly young ruffian, and ain't in it with Ben. Ben is very strong for a young man of his age, and does McMaster up fine. Tom True is certainly a true friend. I expect he almost idolizes Ben for his coolness and daring. He also is a true friend to Miss Dorothy Dare, who in the close I think will fall in love with Ben and he with her. Ben is a good baseball player. He is a sly pitcher, and the way Pinky Sweet warns him about that football game is all right. I think Pinky will soon be a good friend of Ben's. Who wouldn't despise McMaster? I will continue to read the story, for I think it is fine. Hoping Ben is victorious in all he undertakes, I beg to remain an interested reader. L. M.

You will find the story just as absorbing in the succeeding numbers, and we hope you will continue to read it. Ben returns thanks for kind wishes.

East Boston, Mass., Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read the "Three Chums at School." I think they are all right. As for Ben Bright, I think he is all right, too, and as for Tom True, he is true to his friends, Ben Bright and Dorothy Dare. Dorothy Dare is a little dear to Ben and Tom, and they are good and true to all; then let us give three cheers.

Three cheers for Ben Bright,
The brightest of them all;
Three cheers for Tom True,
The truest of them all;
Three cheers for Dorothy Dare,
The dearest to them all.
I think I had better stop,
And wish the "Three Chums" to go on top.

Yours truly, Edward Shaw, 110 Porter st.

We will try and put them at the top just as soon as possible, and hope that you will help us to do so by telling all your friends to read "Three Chums."

Utica, N. Y., Nov. 23, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—As I stepped into a news-dealer's store the other day, I noticed a new paper named "Three Chums." Well, as I had a spare nickel in my pocket, I thought I would invest it in the paper. I took it home and read it, and my verdict afterward was that it was a first-class story, and that I would have a spare nickel every week, as I intend to keep right on reading them until Mr. Harry Moore's pen wears out, which I hope it won't for a good many years to come. If his stories are as interesting as No. 1, I don't think it will. As for the hero, you could not find a better model than Ben. Your steadfast reader, John Owens.

We trust that you may have many spare nickels to spend on "Three Chums," and that you will take Ben Bright for your model.

Seattle, Wash., Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have just finished reading No. 2 of the "Three Chums," and must say that it ranks among the most interesting books published, and that Ben Bright is a model young American. And I hope the time will come when Ben, Tom and Dorothy Dare will put upon the boards the play "Three Chums." Their motto is great: "All for one and one for all." Mr. Moore, the author, is a splendid writer, and his book will surely be a success. May it live forever. My regards to all. Harry Cain.

You will hear of them with their play some day. Mr. Moore returns thanks, as do we for your kind wish.

New York, Nov. 21, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I write these few lines to let you know that I am a reader of "Three Chums," and cannot express in words how pleased I am with it. I have read Nos. 1 and 2, and will continue to read it as long as it is published. I think every boy ought to be a reader of these books, as it will do him no harm. I again congratulate the author of "Three Chums," hoping he will make all as interesting as the first two. Yours respectfully, William F. Klenck, 113 St. Mark's Place.

Of course they won't do a boy harm, and we agree with you. Mr. Moore returns thanks. You will not find "Three Chums" lacking in interest as it continues.

San Francisco, Cal., Nov. 23, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read the first and second numbers of your latest publication, the "Three Chums," and hope that Mr. Moore will be as successful with future numbers as he was with them. I read a great many weeklies, but I believe that the "Three Chums" is in the lead. Your faithful reader, Ed M. Bordwell.

The "Three Chums" will be in the front rank, at all events. We are glad you like it, and hope you will continue to read it.

Paterson, N. J., Nov. 24, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I see you have sent me a sample copy of "Three Chums." I have read every number and like them all. I think there is not a novel that can beat "Three Chums." I am getting all my friends to take them. Yours respectfully, William Ensor, 250 Straight st.

Thanks for recommending "Three Chums" to your friends. We hope you will continue to read it.

Brooklyn, N. Y., Nov. 18, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—Seeing that you put on the market a new weekly named "Three Chums," and ask for an opinion, I cheerfully give mine. Mr. Moore is an A 1 writer, and I hope to see him rank foremost of all the authors of weeklies. I have read "Three Chums" from No. 1 to the present number, and hope that on a Friday I won't be "busted" so that I can't get "Three Chums." Hoping that my letter ain't too long, I close, wishing a long life to the author and publisher. Yours truly, A. B. C.

We trust that you will never be "busted," either on Friday or at any other time, and that you will continue to read "Three Chums."

Macon, Mo., Nov. 17, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read the first and second numbers of the "Three Chums," and think it has no rival in the field. Why not put an exchange column in "Three Chums?" Out of all your publications there is none of them that contains an exchange mart. Leave it to a vote of the readers. Hoping you will consider the matter, I remain an interested reader of "Three Chums." Yours, W. J. Summers.

We did put the matter to a vote some time ago, and our readers by a very large majority decided against an exchange column. We are glad that you like "Three Chums," and hope that you will continue to read and like it.

Boston, Mass., Nov. 19, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read one copy of the "Three Chums," and I think it very nice, and I shall continue to be a reader. Yours truly, Herbert Corwin.

We hope you will, and that you will like each number better than the first.

Suffolk, Va., Nov. 20, 1899.

Mr. Frank Tousey—

Dear Sir:—I have read the first two numbers of "Three Chums," and can say they are the best weekly going to keep a boy out of mischief. You may depend on me as a steady reader. I will recommend the paper to one and all. Ben's admirer, Clyde Dennie.

Anything that keeps boys out of mischief must be good, for boys are inclined that way. Thanks for promise to recommend "Three Chums."

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